

DISCOURSE

ON

PROPHECY

AS AN

EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

By CHARLES W. UPHAM,
Junior Pastor of the First Church, in Salem.

THE LIBRARY
S.D.A. Theological Seminary
Takoma Park
Washington 12, D.C.

SALEM:
Press of the Gazette and Mercury.
1835.

JAMES WHITE L
ANDREWS UNIV
BERRIEN SPRINGS, MICHIGAN

Vault
BS
647
.U85
HER.

DISCOURSE

L. R. O. H. E. G. 1

Vault
BS
647
U 85
HER

THE LIBRARY
214 Jackson Building
Washington, D.C.

TO THE
YOUNG MEN OF SALEM,
THIS DISCOURSE,
Originally prepared at their request,
IS
RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,
BY THEIR FRIEND,
THE AUTHOR.

CONTENTS.

SEC. I.	Introduction	- - - -	P. 1—9.
SEC. II.	Interpretation of prophetical language		10—22.
SEC. III.	The Argument stated	- - -	22—27.
SEC. IV.	Historical Evidence	- - -	27—31.
SEC. V.	Authenticity of the Scriptures	-	31—57.
SEC. VI.	Prophecy uttered by all Judea	-	57—66.
SEC. VII.	Result of the Argument	-	66—71.
SEC. VIII.	Conclusion	- - - -	71—72.

DISCOURSE.

SECTION I.—INTRODUCTION.

It is an essential characteristic of christian faith, that it can only be attained by the voluntary and independent efforts of every individual mind. It is not an instinctive conviction, neither can it descend as an inheritance. It is not written in visible characters on the face of the heavens, neither is it so imprinted on the hearts of one generation as to be transmitted as a matter of course to the next. To be found it must always be sought.

It was, undoubtedly, within the compass of Almighty power to have clothed religious truth with such evidence that the mind could have no choice or action in receiving it, and to have displayed it with such clearness of demonstration, that it would have been impossible for a rational being to doubt for a moment. A faith thus irresistible and instantaneous, would necessarily have been universal ; and being at once complete, there would have been no room for further illustration, or greater confirmation. But it has not been so ordered. While the evidences of our religion are abundantly provided, and placed within our reach, we must still reach before we can grasp them. Every man can be, and ought to be, a believer, but no man can become a believer without an active use of his own faculties to that end. Faith is not an inherent or transmitted principle in the mind ; but is a result to which the mind must be led by its own exercise.

In this, as in every other arrangement of Providence, we discern the proofs of infinite wisdom. The process of study and examination, by which a person becomes an intelligent christian believer, is itself a most effect-

ual means of christian improvement. While engaged in exploring the foundations of our faith, we shall obtain brighter views of the truths it unfolds, and receive deeper impressions of the duties it inculcates. We shall thus become more fully imbued with its spirit, and be led more soberly and devoutly to appreciate the authority with which it imposes its obligations on our lives, and addresses its appeals to our hearts.

Christianity never will display its entire power until all its professors shall have become such by the force of evidence bearing directly upon their own private and personal convictions. And it has failed to work out its legitimate and appropriate effects upon the customs of society, and the manners and morals of men, because, ever since the primitive age, instead of being received as the result of personal inquiry and individual examination, it has been transmitted by tradition, and handed down, as a sort of hereditary possession, from one generation to another. How can it be expected that a man should manifest the power of christianity in his life and character, who can give no better reason for professing christianity, than that his father professed it before him, and, in all probability, on the same ground ! It would be unreasonable to expect to find, in such a man, any of the peculiar fruits of the morality of the gospel, because his religion, thoroughly sifted, will turn out to be precisely the same with that of the heathen, who receives his system of idolatry with a similar implicit and passive faith, as inherited by birth from his ancestors.

This consideration discloses to us, in part at least, the purpose for which infidelity is permitted to disturb the church. If none were bold enough to dispute the evidences of christianity, but few would be induced to examine them. Perhaps unbelief will be allowed to acquire a much more fearful extension and influence than it has yet reached, as the only effectual means of awakening christians to the examination of the foundations of their faith. When this result shall have been produced, when the attention of the whole church shall be directed to the evidences as well as the doctrines of its faith, when it shall be universally understood that belief cannot be inherited, but that every man, before he assumes the name of a believer, must be able to

give a reason for his belief, then, but not till then, will infidelity begin to disappear forever from the earth, christian truth be seen in its loveliness and felt in its power, and the Lord come again in his kingdom, with great glory.

If infidelity is permitted to exist in the church for this purpose, it becomes us to interpret the peculiarly bold and active form it exhibits in our country at present, as a special call upon us to turn our attention to the grounds of our faith, and to review the evidences and arguments by which it is supported. It shall, accordingly, be my aim, in this discourse, to present a sketch of some of the proofs by which the christian religion may be defended ; and although my remarks will be chiefly confined to one particular branch of evidence, I would indulge the hope that they may tend to the general confirmation of the faith of my hearers.

It was a remark of Dr. Paley, that "in all cases, wherein the mind feels itself in danger of being confounded by variety, it is sure to rest upon a few strong points, or perhaps upon a single instance. Amongst a multitude of proofs, it is *one* that does the business."* This observation will be confirmed by the experience of every person who has examined and admitted the evidences of christianity. They are various, numerous, and complicated one with another. Sometimes the argument urges the force of miracles, sometimes of prophecy, is diversified to a greater extent than would be imagined previous to the investigation, and is made to connect itself with an almost indefinite multiplicity of topics and details. In securing to his revealed truth this variety of evidence, the author of revelation has given another display of his infinite wisdom. It is thus made to recommend itself to all minds, however different may be their habits and traits. Each one finds itself provided with that particular kind of proof which is adapted to prevail and convince.

The prophetic argument has been found especially effectual in converting unbelievers, and confirming the faith of christians themselves. Recent events have drawn towards it rather an uncommon degree of attention, and besides its intrinsic importance, as, in the

* Paley's Natural Theology—Conclusion.

judgment of many, the preeminently decisive evidence of christianity, it involves the discussion of another topic, with reference to which, at the present time, the public mind particularly needs to be informed. I mean the authenticity and antiquity of the sacred writings of the Old and New Testament. This is a subject which is essentially connected with all the evidences of our religion. They severally depend more or less upon it. The Bible is not only the rule and record of our faith, but is its armory and monument. We resort to it, not only for the doctrines of revelation, but also for many of the weapons by which that revelation itself is to be defended. In respect to the prophetical argument, however, it is obvious that it relies absolutely upon the greater antiquity of the predictions, than of the events that fulfilled them. It is therefore, a necessary part of my plan, to prove the antiquity of the sacred writings.

It shall be my first endeavor to present a just view of prophecy, as an evidence of the truth of the christian religion, and to disembarrass it of those extraneous elements which have been appended to it, thereby impairing its strength, and exposing it to unnecessary objections.

It is very observable, that the essentials of christian belief, as established by the Savior himself, and determined by those who alone were authorised to pronounce decisively on the subject, are comprised in a single proposition of faith, and a single affirmation of fact. The confession of belief required by Christ himself was the single proposition of faith that he was the Messiah of the Jewish Prophets. "When Jesus came into the coasts of Cesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? And they said, some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto you, but my Father which is in Heaven"

The reply of Peter, thus most emphatically approved by the Lord himself, must be regarded as a satisfactory

and adequate confession of faith. It will be better understood by bearing in mind that "Christ" is the Greek form of expressing the Hebrew word "Messiah." "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God." It would indeed, have been of very great advantage, had the word *Messiah* been invariably retained by our translators. Instead of "Jesus Christ," the proper title of the author of our religion is "Jesus the Messiah," and ought to have been used in all places. It would have tended to preserve in the minds of his followers the ground upon which he rested his claim to their belief, as him of whom the prophets had spoken, and whose coming God had promised to his people.*

After the resurrection of Jesus, which event was the great and conclusive proof that he was indeed the Messiah, and that God was with him, authenticating his title to that character, the fact that he had been raised from the dead became of such importance and interest in the minds of the Apostles, that they placed it at the very foundation of their faith. We accordingly find that Paul, writing to the Romans,† says, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." We have then, the authority of the Savior, and of his great Apostle, in favor of the sufficiency of these two articles, as a confession of faith: that Jesus was the Messiah of the prophets, and that his right to that title was confirmed by his resurrection from the dead. Whoever believes these two articles, has the faith of a christian, and is a disciple of Christ. This is a point clearly established by the decisive testimony of the scriptures of the New Testament; and we must, therefore, instead of resorting to fallible individuals, or equally fallible councils, who in almost every period and division of the church have presumed to devise and determine what they have called systems of essential faith, yield our assent and submit our minds to the decisions of those who alone have been empowered by divine inspiration to fix a creed for the church, and must receive the proposition, that the elements of a saving faith are all comprehended in

* Matth. chap. xvi. 13—17. See also Acts, ch. viii. 27—38.

† Chap. x. v. 9.

the belief that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah of the Prophets, and that by rising from the dead he put the seal to his mission, in that capacity, and declared himself the son of God with power.*

A high and effectual moral power is ascribed to these two articles of faith in the evangelical writings. Whoever believed them, in the primitive age, was thereby rendered fit for baptism, and converted into a follower of Jesus. They were declared mighty to save.

If such decisive effects have ceased to be produced upon the character of those who profess to believe these grand articles of christian faith, the fact can only be explained by supposing, either that they have lost their power, or that they are not believed as they originally were, that is, that they are not received with the same distinctness, individuality, and earnestness of conviction, as in the first age of the church. The former of these alternatives cannot be allowed for a moment. No reason can be imagined why the belief that Jesus was the Messiah, and that he rose from the dead, should not, in itself considered, be as effectual in its moral influence upon the characters of those who receive it, at the present day, as it was upon the early christians, who, for the most part, had no other grounds for their belief, than we have for ours. With the exception of the comparatively small number who had personally witnessed the miracles of Jesus, or those performed in his name, or who had conversed with him after his resurrection, the first converts received the gospel upon the same principles of human testimony and documentary evidence, by which our belief is claimed, and to which it is yielded.

Adopting, therefore, the other alternative, and proceeding upon the supposition that these articles of faith have become comparatively inoperative, because they are received with a vague, passive, and traditionary faith, and not with a clear discriminating perception of

* There is some difficulty in ascertaining, in all cases, the precise meaning of the expressions "Son of Man," and "Son of God." There is reason to believe that frequently Jesus is called the "Son of Man," alluding to his natural descent, and "Son of God," alluding to the renovation of his life, and his birth, as it were, into a higher state of being, at his resurrection.—See Luke xx. 36. Romans i. 4.

the evidences on which they ought to be made to rest in every individual mind, I propose to exhibit a view of those evidences, which appears to me to be just, and such as must awaken the attention and convince the reason of every intelligent and thoughtful mind. And while it is my earnest aim to confirm the christian faith of my hearers, it is at the same time my humble expectation that the discussion may be the means of promoting their general improvement in knowledge and virtue.

The great principle which our Lord himself declared to be the foundation stone of his gospel, was that he was "the Christ," that is, "the Messiah." I shall therefore particularly direct my argument to this point. It is apparent that the belief of the other article of the New Testament creed, that is, that Jesus rose from the dead, inasmuch as that event was the most signal manifestation of his office, will follow, as a matter of course, when it has once been proved that he sustained that office.

It is obvious that the inquiry upon which we are about to enter, is in reality but another form of the prophetic argument. This branch of christian evidence has recently been brought into particular notice; a circumstance to which I allude merely for the purpose of more particularly indicating the object of this discourse, which is, to show that the questions, which have been raised, do not bear, in the least degree, upon the prophetic argument rightly understood. They do not touch, much less do they, as some have apprehended, shake the pillars of christian evidence. They leave our faith resting firmly on the same foundation upon which the apostles placed it.

The opinion has been entertained by some writers, and has recently been broached among us, that the particular passages, in the Jewish Scriptures, which have been supposed to predict the coming of a character such as the title "Messiah" was used to describe, did not, in reality, refer to any such personage, and that, upon a careful and thorough investigation, they will not be found to agree with the events in the life, or the traits in the character, of Jesus of Nazareth. Although the writer who has promulgated these views, on our side of the Atlantic, is a most sincere and zeal-

ous christian, whose time and talents are faithfully devoted to the study and illustration of the sacred scriptures, a wide-spread alarm seems to have been propagated, lest his speculations might tend to weaken, if not destroy, the foundations of our faith. But when the subject of prophecy, as an evidence of christianity, shall become clearly understood, it will at once be seen that this alarm is entirely groundless.*

Before proceeding to show that the argument in favor of christianity drawn from the fulfilment of prophecy, is placed beyond the reach of the speculations into which critics have been or may be led in reference to the meaning of particular passages in the Old or New Testament, I would pause for a moment to express my grateful satisfaction that special attention has been so effectually drawn to this subject.

While we lament that any persons can become so far blinded to their own happiness and welfare as to allow themselves to fall into unbelief, it becomes us not to be insensible to the designs of Providence in permitting such an abuse of that freedom of mind which has been bestowed upon us. We ought to discern in it a signal display of that infinite power and wisdom by which good is extracted from evil, and the enemies of divine truth so overruled as to become instruments of distinguished efficacy in promoting its progress. It is the natural consequence of the appearance of open infidelity, in any community, that the minds of men are led to an examination of the grounds of christian belief. The louder the declamation, the more formidable the apparent strength of those who assail our faith, the greater will be the zeal, and the more decisive the influence of those who will be brought forward in its defence. And the objections, and modes of speculation of such as either disbelieve or doubt, so far as they become prevalent, must serve to awaken the general attention of men to the arguments by which they are to be

* The writer to whom I allude is Rev. George R. Noyes, who is understood to be the author of a review of "Hengstenberg's Christology," in the Christian Examiner of July 1834, Art. III. p. 321. Mr. Noyes is universally known as the Translator of "Job" and the "Psalms," and is allowed by the learned of all denominations, to be one of the best Hebrew scholars of the age, and the very best translator of the ancient Scriptures into our language.

removed or refuted. We ought not, therefore, to regard with regret, so far as the interests of the church at large are concerned, the diffusion of infidelity to a still greater extent than has yet been experienced, if it brings with it, or draws after it, a more general and lively interest in the evidences of the gospel as a divine revelation.

We know that the discussions, controversies, and disputes, which have taken place among christians, have invariably tended to introduce clearer and juster, more effective and more delightful views of the topics about which they have been agitated. So, in like manner, we may rest assured that the conflicting speculations of christian writers in reference to questions of christian evidence will result in confirming the faith of believers, by circulating among them a more intelligent and discriminating acquaintance with the principles of their faith.

We ought not, therefore, to be alarmed or displeased when views are presented, which may have the appearance of impairing the foundations of christian belief. We should rather rejoice that the meditations and inquiries of men are attracted to the consideration and examination of subjects whose truth will surely become more and more evident and effectual, the longer and the more freely they are discussed.

With the hope that such may be the consequence of our inquiries and meditations, I propose to pursue the discussion of the prophetic basis of christianity. It will be my object to show that our religion rests upon a foundation which never yet has been shaken, nay, which has not even been assailed or approached ; and that Prophecy constitutes an evidence so strong and decisive as to deserve to be considered, as it was by the Saviour and his Apostles, the very corner stone of the religion he established and they preached. May I indulge the hope that your careful and inquisitive attention will be given to the subject, as it is laid before you, and that, if it should prove satisfactory and conclusive to your minds, their convictions may be proclaimed by your lips, and, in still more emphatic and effectual language, by your lives.

SECTION II. — INTERPRETATION OF PROPHETICAL LANGUAGE.

THE prophetical argument, as it has been commonly exhibited, is this. There is such a minute and comprehensive correspondence between certain passages in the Old Testament, professing to be prophetical, and the origin, life, death, character and church of Jesus of Nazareth, that it cannot, upon rational principles be ascribed either to mere chance or to conjecture, but can only be accounted for on the supposition that the authors of those passages were divinely inspired, and thus enabled to foretell distant future events. In opposition to this argument, thus put, it is said that some of these passages are obscure ; that part of them are of doubtful signification, referring apparently to other events and circumstances, as much, if not more, than to any connected with Jesus of Nazareth ; and that it is not certain that many, if any, of them actually were designed by their authors to be applied to him.

I shall first endeavor to suggest such considerations as may, perhaps, be thought sufficient to remove these objections ; and then, I shall proceed to place the prophetical argument on a different ground from what it has usually been made to occupy, and where it will not be affected by difficulties found, or imagined to exist, in any passages of the Old Testament whatever.

The discussion, in the present stage of it, will necessarily involve questions of philology, which cannot easily be made to wear an engaging and popular dress, but I shall hope to present them in an intelligible manner.

It is proper to admit, at the outset, what has been strongly urged, and, as it seems to me, fully proved, that some of the passages of the Old Testament, which have been quoted by christian authors, as they were, indeed, by the New Testament writers themselves, as predictive of Jesus of Nazareth, cannot, in all their clauses, be interpreted as intended to apply to him. It is my purpose, as a preliminary to the main design of this discussion, to show that such an admission does not, necessarily, affect the character of the Old Testament writers as Prophets, or impair their credit as inspired men.

It will be shown, I think, that it is no objection to a prophetical passage, as allusive to Jesus of Nazareth,

if in some particular clauses it cannot be strictly applied to him. For, the question may fairly be asked, why should we expect to find a prophetical description corresponding in every particular with the event it predicts? May it not safely be allowed that, while the leading points in a prophetical passage are seen clearly to relate to the object predicted, there may be other inferior points, entirely incidental to the main purpose of the passage, introduced by the laws of accidental association, and thus blended with the prophecy; or may they not be still prophetical, and refer to other events or characters, either known to us because fulfilled in the past occurrence of the events or characters, or still unintelligible, either from the circumstance that their explanation depends upon a fulfilment to take place in future, or from some other cause?

These questions, it will be seen, resolve themselves into another—May not a prophetical passage refer to more than one object? In answering this question in the affirmative, I am aware that I may be brought into conflict with a modern critical canon which restricts the interpretation of all language to a single sense. Notwithstanding the very general acquiescence of late writers in this canon, and the learning and wisdom of many who have advocated it, I am constrained to doubt its correctness, whether applied to the language of scripture or any other writings whatever.

It seems to me that it cannot even be considered as invariably applicable to forms of expression used to convey ideas which are the result of the natural exercise of the ordinary faculties of the mind, much less to language employed in the endeavor to express images and ideas brought before the mind by a supernatural operation, under the influence of extraordinary illumination. This conclusion is forced upon me by a consideration of the nature of language, viewed as the instrument by which the thoughts of one mind are communicated to other minds. Strictly analyzed and scrutinized, it appears that language is almost always to be regarded as expressive of double senses. This is invariably true of figurative language, which makes up a much larger part of speech than is commonly thought. All words expressive of moral and intellectual objects and relations are of this description. This is, in truth, the only

way in which a signification can be given to such words. An analogy is supposed to exist between the physical and spiritual world. A term is adopted which originally signifies a subject or relation of matter, and it is made to suggest, in addition to that signification, a corresponding moral or mental idea. The process of reasoning or speculation by which this supposed analogy was first established in the convictions of men, has never yet been ascertained. It is one of the mysteries of human nature. Although we are not able to trace it to its origin and fully explain it, the fact is nevertheless unquestionable, that the portion of every language employed to express moral and intellectual ideas and relations, can only become thus expressive, by suggesting images of matter in the first place, with which the mind, by a mysterious and apparently instinctive faculty of association, instantly blends the spiritual conceptions and ideas intended to be communicated. That is, this large part of every language is figurative.* But figurative words necessarily have double senses. They convey ideas of the images themselves and of the sentiments those images are designed to illustrate and suggest. Figurative language is, in fact, but another form of hieroglyphics. In the latter the image is *painted*, in the former it is *described* by alphabetical characters. They both equally attain their end, by attaching to the perception of an outward object the simultaneous or immediate conception of a moral sentiment or an abstract idea. When a circle is seen on an Egyptian hieroglyphical tablet, all would admit that it suggests two ideas at once to the mind, that of a figure of a circle itself, and that of indefiniteness or eternity. So also every figurative word suggests two or more ideas, although the process of association may be so rapid or habitual as not to be consciously discerned, except by an express effort of mental analysis.

The language of our Lord is almost always to be regarded as, in this view, expressive of double senses. He was accustomed to turn the attention of his hearers

* A French Philologist once went so far as to recommend the proscription of all figurative words from abstract discussions. But it is obvious that the plan was impracticable. It is impossible to give any meaning to moral or scientific terms except by employing the supposed analogies of matter.

to the contemplation of outward objects, so as to make those objects suggest moral and religious instruction. He inculcated the precepts of wisdom and awakened the sentiments of piety, by pointing to the lilies of the field and to the birds of the air ; and thus made the visible scene through which he passed vocal with the teachings of divine truth. The well of Samaria proclaimed the opening of that spiritual fountain from which the water might be drawn that would cause those who drank of it to thirst no more. The barren fig tree uttered the language of awful warning to those who neglected to bring forth the fruits of virtue in their season. And the sun, rising in splendor beyond the eastern hills, illustrated, in its radiance, the beams of that gospel which was to become, at last, the light of the whole world. So habitual was this mode of instruction, with the Savior, that we are enabled, in all cases, to infer the condition of the external scene, from the character of his expressions. When, for instance, he says that the harvest is indeed plenteous, we may allow ourselves to imagine that he was standing in the midst of fields bearing the rich burdens of matured summer, and waiting to fall into the hands of the reaper. And when he uttered the admirable parable of the seed scattered by the husbandman, we may safely conclude that the season had commenced when

“ Through the neighboring fields the sower stalks
 “ With measured step ; and liberal throws the grain
 “ Into the faithful bosom of the ground.”

But it is not only figurative language that is expressive of double senses. Almost the whole of that other portion which is employed to denote objects of sense, is, in fact, used in the same manner. When, for instance, we speak of “ river,” “ horse,” or “ ship,” if we carefully scrutinize the state of our minds we shall find that in neither case are we occupied by a single object of thought, but a complex idea, of greater or less multiplicity, is, in each instance, passing before us. If the word “ river” is used, we think simultaneously of a flowing sheet of water and its sloping banks ; if “ horse,” the noble animal, with his graceful but powerful limbs, his flashing eye, flowing mane, and all his other striking aspects, rises at once to view ; or if the

word be "ship," then the images of the tall masts and bending sails, and of the ocean through which she ploughs her passage, at once engage the imagination, and fill the mind.

Now if both figurative language and words expressive of objects of sense, which constitute the whole basis of every vocabulary, when used separately are found to convey always more than one, and in most cases actually an indefinite number of ideas, it may fairly be questioned whether it will be safe to insist that the sentences which are formed by their combination, must invariably be interpreted in a single sense.*

But the consideration which, more than all others, determines this point, is the fact that language is not used so much to express, as to suggest ideas. Words are not the vehicles of thoughts, whether one or more, but hints employed to set us on thinking in a particular direction. They start, in most instances, a train of thoughts. So far, therefore, from its being true that they must always be interpreted as expressive of a single solitary sense, they actually communicate a cluster of ideas at once, the variety and number of which depend upon the skill and copiousness of mind of the writer or speaker, and also upon the activity and vivacity of association of the reader or hearer. When, for instance, in observing the rite of the Lord's Supper, the words of the Savior, "This is my body, which is given for you : this do in remembrance of me:" and "This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you," are repeated, no one would pretend to enumerate the ideas and affections they actually express or suggest in the minds of the administrator and participants of the service, which will be more or less

* I am aware that some eminent writers have endeavored to prove that where more than one idea is suggested by any word, they do not occupy the mind *at once*, but succeed each other with a rapidity too great to be consciously discerned. But besides the impossibility of determining this point, it may be safely admitted without prejudicing my argument. It is highly probable that the ideas suggested by words present themselves in succession to the mind, although the succession may, frequently, be too rapid to be appreciated. It is indeed the highest proof of a wise and excellent use of language by a writer or speaker, that his words and sentences put the mind upon a train of thinking, that is, suggest, in succession, a great number of meanings.

in number, and indefinitely diversified, according to their several liveliness of fancy, quickness of association, familiarity with the history and designs of the ordinance, and fervor of grateful, benevolent, and devout affection.

The late Dugald Stewart, one of the most valuable metaphysical writers of the last generation, has discussed this curious subject in a most instructive manner. "We speak," says he "of *communicating*, by means of words, our ideas and our feelings to others; and we seldom reflect sufficiently on the latitude with which this metaphorical phrase ought to be understood. The truth is, that even in conversing on the plainest and most familiar subjects, however full and circumstantial our statements may be, the words which we employ, if examined with accuracy, will be found to do nothing more than to suggest hints to our hearers, leaving by far the principal part of the process of interpretation to be performed by the mind itself." — "The fact is, that, in cases of this sort, the function of language is not so much to *convey* knowledge (according to the common phrase) from one mind to another, as to bring two minds into *the same train of thinking*, and to confine them, as nearly as possible, to the same track. Many authors have spoken of the wonderful *mechanism of speech*, but none has hitherto attended to the far more wonderful *mechanism* which it puts into action behind the scene."*

Perhaps these views of language, when fully carried out, and illustrated, as they might easily be, by instances drawn from every branch of literature, and our common usages of speech, would be found to result in the conclusion that words do not only possess the power of suggesting numerous ideas, at once, to a hearer or reader, but are actually employed by the speaker or writer in a variety of senses. In other words, they may be used for the very purpose of starting different minds upon different tracks, and of suggesting to the same mind a diversity of associations and reflections.— And, if so, it can hardly be maintained, as a canon of interpretation, that the language of an author must always be regarded as expressive of a single determinate sense. But however it may be, in reference to language

* See Philosophical Essays by Dugald Stewart. Essay v., chap. 1.

used to convey ideas resulting from the ordinary exercise of the natural faculties of the mind, we must, at any rate, be allowed to pause, before we apply such a rule of interpretation to language employed to indicate the results of an extraordinary exercise of the mind, when discerning with supernatural illumination, and acted upon by a divine energy, as must be supposed in the case of prophecy. By the very nature of the case such language may claim to be, to some extent, exempt from the operation of those rules which are drawn from the aspects and exercises of its ordinary condition, and can, therefore, only be applied with strictness and certainty to its productions, when in that condition.* Even, then, if language when ordinarily used should be restrained in its interpretation to a single determinate sense in every instance, it might still be maintained that prophetic language may be allowed to be expressive of double or complex senses†.

If it should be admitted that the prophetic writers, when indulging in their enthusiastic descriptions of the future glories of the Messiah's Kingdom, allowed themselves to borrow, by the natural laws of association, light, and shade, and various coloring, from other characters and events, which thus became blended in their language with what referred to the principal object of their meditations, it would follow, I grant, as a natural consequence, that some difficulty might be experienced, in arranging and classifying their language, so as to determine the particular application of each clause.

But the most obvious reason why we may not understand, or be able to apply the whole of a passage supposed to be prophetic, is that it may not yet be entirely fulfilled, and that nothing but the occurrence of the predicted event can supply the key to unlock its meaning. In such cases those parts of the prediction, which

* "Est enim in *verbo prophetico*, quod sacris voluminibus continetur, quoddam *hypsos* inimitabile, quod Rhetorum Epicorumque dictionis gravitatem, pondus, elegantiam, longis intervallis superat; iis maxime periochis, quibus, novissimorum temporum beneficia et prerogativæ describuntur."—*Vitringa—Observationum Sacrarum*, lib. v. cap. iii. p. 29.

† An instance of the mode of interpretation for which I here contend can be seen in Lowth's Translation of Isaiah, Chap XL. Note.

have been fulfilled, will be more clear and intelligible than such as remain to be interpreted by future events. There are, perhaps, many such prophecies. It is well known that some passages of scripture, recorded as having been uttered by our Lord, are supposed, by many interpreters, to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, and by others, to the final judgment of all mankind. The view I wish to suggest is this. Is it not possible that both of these events were exhibited, at the same time, to the mind of the Savior ; and may not his language have received its form and coloring from their simultaneous and combined contemplation ? The destruction of Jerusalem is passed. In its incidents and circumstances we discern a most wonderful accomplishment and interpretation of the larger part of this language, and enough to impress upon it the most unquestionable stamp of inspired prophecy. When the other awful event occurs, may not the words of the Saviour then be found still more completely and signally fulfilled ? So, in like manner, when John foretold the rise of antichrist, might, not only the then future Romish hierarchy, but all other usurping powers in the church, all who in every age have seized the prerogative of the Almighty, and attempted to ascend his judgment seat and sit, as Gods, on his throne in men's hearts and consciences, have been presented in one mingled and extended picture before the rapt and elevated spirit of the prophet of Patmos ? And, if so, why may not the idea be admitted, that when the heavenly illumination shone into the mind of an ancient Jewish Prophet, not only the transcendant glories of the Messiah's reign, but, also, the forms of other intermediate or subsequent analogous characters and events were discovered to his sight ? In such a case it would have been entirely natural that the prophet's description of the vision should borrow some of its outlines and hues from those other objects, and, therefore, not be applicable, in every particular, to what was the principal subject of the prediction. In order to illustrate this view more clearly, I would present the following supposition, although we may, perhaps, be attempting what is impracticable, in endeavoring to conceive, in any degree whatever, of the state and mode of operation of a mind which is enabled by supernatural power, to look beyond the veil

which shuts out the future from mortal view. Let us suppose the case of a person lifted above the surface of the earth, and borne aloft in a balloon. As he ascends, the horizon is enlarged, and scenes, which the natural vision of those who walk below, never could have embraced, are opened around him. Perhaps the object, which chiefly arrests his notice, is some lofty mountain, towering away in the dim and shadowy distance. While he gazes upon it, the forms of other intermediate objects may, at the same time, be impressed upon his organs of sight, and blend their own colors and outlines with the image of the mountain. After descending to the earth, the aeronaut, in describing the mountain ranges, thus discovered, might throw into the account some particulars which would be true only of those other objects, which, although in point of fact separate and intermediate, had seemingly constituted a part of the undistinguishable picture imprinted upon his sight ; or if he knew them to be separate and intermediate, he might mention them incidentally, and by way of complement to the main topic of his account. In delineating the features of the mountain which constituted the leading object in the scene thus extraordinarily displayed to his view, it would be quite natural for him to touch upon the rivers, fields, and forests also embraced in the circuit of his vision. So, when the ancient prophet was lifted up, the ordinary horizon of time became enlarged, and the future was disclosed to his gaze. The most prominent object in the supernatural view was the advent of the Messiah ; but who can say that the entire intermediate vista of events, and also perhaps the indefinite series of events subsequent to his coming, were not at the same time revealed to him ? And if so, we ought not to be surprised if, while the advent of the Messiah occupies the chief place in his description of the scene, he may also allude to some of the other objects which arrested his attention.

There is another consideration which deserves to be borne in mind in examining this subject. It is evident that the Jewish system of polity and worship was arranged by its divine author with a view to its final consummation and disappearance in the Messiah's reign. The Law was intended to prepare the way for the introduction of the Gospel. The form of ritual was con-

structed upon this principle ; and, in many important particulars, the events and characters of the Jewish history were overruled in such a manner as to present analogies and resemblances of the final dispensation. It was in this sense that the gospel sent its shadow before, so that its outlines can be distinctly traced in institutions which existed and incidents that occurred ages previous to its promulgation. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews expressly calls "the law," "a shadow of good things to come ;" and, in truth, the supposition of such an analogy or system of types and shadows, of which the archetypes and substance are to be found in Christ and his gospel, is the basis of the entire reasoning of this very interesting and valuable part of scripture. Upon similar principles of interpretation, we may discern a typical reference of the sacrifices of the Jewish ritual to the great final sacrifice of the cross. The minds of devout and thoughtful men among the Jewish converts to christianity were much inclined to trace a manifestation of the moral sentiments and leading ideas of the gospel throughout the whole range of their own ancient scriptures and national annals. Paul's beautiful and most admirable historical illustration of the principle of Faith, will occur, to every reader, as an instance of this peculiar turn of thought, and exercise of mind among his fellow converts of Jewish origin. In harmony with this view, I am not reluctant to admit that the language of the prophets may sometimes be more particularly applicable to other characters and histories, than those of Jesus of Nazareth, which may have been blended with predictions relating to him, because they were regarded by the prophets as analogous and preparative events, as shadowing forth his coming, and as, on these accounts, worthy of being associated with those visions of his glory which they were permitted to contemplate and to describe.

Another great principle to be kept in view when we attempt to interpret the language of prophecy, is that from its very nature it must always be more or less obscure. Instead, therefore, of rejecting a passage from the list of those considered prophetic, because there may be some phrases or clauses belonging to it which do not appear to be applicable to the leading subject of the prediction, we should regard it as a necessary inci-

dent to prophetic language to be in part thus difficult of interpretation. "No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation." That is, Prophecy is so constituted that no individual, however learned he may be, and no company of interpreters, however numerous, can derive from a prophetic passage, a certain, clear, and complete delineation of the event to which it relates. Difficult clauses are purposely inserted to render such an attempt impracticable. It can only be interpreted by the occurrence of the event itself, and when the event shall have occurred, then a *sufficient* degree of light will be shed upon the passage to render it certain that it was a supernatural prediction of the event. But it is quite probable that some parts of a prophecy will always continue inexplicable, even after its fulfilment has taken place. The expressions and clauses originally inserted to prevent a perfectly certain and precisely literal interpretation, before the occurrence of the event, will, of course, resist all explication forever afterwards.

An elaborate discussion is not needed to show that it is essential to prophecy, as an argument or evidence, that it be unsusceptible of a precise interpretation before hand ; and that the event, it predicts, be brought about by the agency of persons, who, in fulfilling it, are unconscious that they are so doing.

If, for instance, the prophetic descriptions of the person, character, and history of the Messiah had been so clear, distinct, and precise, as to have admitted of no misinterpretation, and have left no room for doubt or diversity of expectation, it would have necessarily followed, that instantly upon the appearance of the Saviour, all would have discerned, at once, in his person and character, a perfect accordance with the predictions. Their fulfilment would have been recognized, and the whole Jewish nation would have been constrained to acknowledge and receive him as their Messiah. In this event, the circumstances of the evangelical history could not have occurred. and those other parts of prophecy which predicted the disbelief of the Jews, and all that followed their disbelief would have failed of fulfilment. It appears, therefore, that a certain degree of obscurity is necessary to prophecy. This is especially the case where human agents are re-

lied upon to fulfil it. If the Jews had fully understood their own prophetical books, it is obvious that to have put the Saviour to death in the manner adopted by them, thereby establishing his cause by enabling him to demonstrate that he was the son of God with power, by his resurrection, would have been one of the last things they would have done. It might be shewn, by a great variety of illustrations, that the consummation of the whole gospel scheme depended upon the circumstance that the parties concerned in transacting it were ignorant, at the time, that they were accomplishing the designs of prophecy. The peculiar strength of the evidence in favor of christianity, drawn from prophecy, consists in the fact that, so far from there being any collusion in the case, human agents were made to accomplish it who were hostile to its accomplishment, and were so overruled as to fulfil it in their treatment of the Saviour, while they were doing all that they could to prevent its fulfilment in his person. If, then, obscurity is so necessary a mark of prophecy, why should we be surprised if we meet, here and there, with difficulties in our attempts to interpret all the words and clauses in which it is expressed?

If it still be insisted that, if prophetical language is so obscure, it will be impossible to interpret it, I admit the objection in its whole length and breadth. It is impossible to interpret prophecy, as other language is interpreted. Critics cannot translate it. Its meaning can only be fixed by events. And the question I would put is this. Allowing that there is much which does not appear applicable to the character and history of Christ, in the language of the Old Testament supposed to be prophetical of him, is there not a correspondence sufficiently remarkable and extensive *upon the whole*, to impress the stamp of genuineness and authenticity upon it as in reality prophetical language? If we confine our attention to those parts of scripture which have been illustrated by the accomplishment of the events which they predicted, we shall find enough to awaken our astonishment, and to confirm our faith. The misfortune is, that interpreters have continually labored in the impossible attempt to decypher, before hand, the meaning of prophecies which yet remain to be fulfilled. Great is the amount of learning, talent

and toil which has thus been thrown away ! The Apostle Peter endeavored to dissuade christians from the indulgence of a curiosity so vain, and from the prosecution of efforts so fruitless. He informs us that prophecy is "a light that shineth in a *dark place*, UNTIL the day dawn," and that "no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation," that is, that prophecy is dark, in itself, and can only be illuminated by a light from without ; that it cannot be decyphered by the ingenuity of man, but must wait until providence has become its interpreter, in educing the events which will explain while they fulfil it.

SECTION III. — THE ARGUMENT STATED.

Although we might, with safety, rely upon the considerations already presented, and insist that, notwithstanding all the objections of either friends or foes, the prophetical writers were particularly and personally inspired, and that there is no solid ground of doubting it in the difficulties experienced in interpreting their language, yet, to show the abundant strength of our cause, I am willing, for argument's sake, to admit that the prophets, so called, were not inspired, and that their writings cannot be considered, strictly speaking, predictions of the coming and character of Jesus Christ. I will do all this ; that is, I will grant all that the objectors have demanded or can demand, and still maintain that the christian religion rests upon a prophetical foundation, which cannot be shaken.

The very remarkable predictions, in the Old Testament, in reference to the fortunes of the Ishmaelites, Babylon, and other ancient nations and cities, taken in connexion with their wonderful fulfilment, constitute, as it seems to me, a most decisive proof of the personal inspiration of the Hebrew Prophets, but, as they do not enter into the prophetical evidence of christianity, as such, are here left out of the account.

The great prophecy upon which christianity rests is founded in the fact that, ages before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, *an expectation had been made to prevail* that such a person would in due time make his appearance on the earth.

It would be unnecessary to enter into a very minute

detail of the various particulars which entered into this expectation. Suffice it to say, that an entire nation, the Jews, believed that, at some future time, a person would appear in their country, deriving his origin from a particular family, who would produce a mighty revolution throughout the whole world, overthrow idolatry, and superstition, and sin, reign supreme over all other powers, and introduce a perpetual kingdom of righteousness, truth and peace. This expectation was held by the Jews, not as the result of any reasoning or calculations of their own minds, but as a divine communication made to them and to their fathers by the mouths of prophets.

The expectation, as held uniformly and universally by the whole people, from generation to generation, is substantially expressed in the above proposition. As was natural, however, a vast variety of incidental and fanciful associations were collected, from time to time, in the minds of the people; and, as has already been allowed, even those persons who ascribe the highest degree of inspiration to particular prophets may safely admit that the usual laws of association would take effect in their minds, and that when contemplating the future glories of the Messiah's reign, as supernaturally presented to their vision, or when describing such contemplations, ideas and images might be suggested, which, in reality, made no part of what had been thus foreshown to them.*

We may safely, therefore, make a distinction between the great original expectation, and all those conjectures, speculations, and fancies, which in the course of ages gathered around it. While the wonderful fulfilment of the former stamps the character of supernatural upon it, and calls for the acknowledgement of divine interposition and illumination, we may, without hesitation, regard the latter as the natural offspring of the common energies of the human intellect, and as of

* Haec spes et expectatio jam mentibus veterum Hebræorum tam profunde firmeque infixæ fuit, ut vel excidio reipublicæ per Nebucadnezarem illato exturbari et vis ejus infringi nequiverit; factum tamen est ut inde ab exilio Babylonico, successu temporis, per varia rerum discrimina vicissitudinesque, in nonnullis, iisque præcipuis, partibus magnam subiret immutationem."—*Christologia Judæorum Jesu Apostolorumque Ætate* a D. Leonhard Bertholdt, p. 7.

no more importance than any other of the innumerable fancies or expectations of mankind.

It is observable, however, that the erroneous ideas connected with this extraordinary national expectation, were precisely such as it was natural for it to suggest. The Jews invested their Messiah with military and political glory, because, in their view, and it was a view in which the whole world then and, to a great extent, still agrees with them, it was the highest glory that could be ascribed to him. As he was to reign over men on earth, they supposed that he would enforce his authority in the only methods then known, or of which they could form a conjecture. Such an empire, over the heart, such a mere spiritual dominion as he was destined to establish, never entered a human imagination until after the day of Pentecost.

It is also important to remark that the erroneous ideas connected with this expectation tended rather to reduce than to exaggerate its dignity and importance. The real dominion of the Messiah is, in fact, infinitely greater and more glorious than it was expected to be by the later generations of the Jews, who had corrupted the original predictions of the prophets, and added to them the fancies of their own minds. They were disappointed in finding that Jesus did not aspire to power and triumph by the use of means, then supposed to be the only ones by which they could be obtained, by the sword, and at the head of armies. Little, indeed, could they comprehend of the real glories of his kingdom ! The world has not yet learned to estimate them. He is, it is true, a temporal prince, inasmuch as he reigns over mankind ; but it is not by the usual implements of military power, or the ordinary means of political action. His empire is sustained by nobler influences and extends its sway over a vastly wider sphere than was ever comprehended by the powers of this world. It embraces the daily lives of all men, controls their constant actions, regulates their hidden thoughts, and prevails over their inmost desires and most secret affections. It cannot, therefore, be objected that the coming of Christ and the establishment of his religion fell short of the expectations of the Jews. In point of fact those expectations were transcended, and have been more than fulfilled, in his character and mission.

Before proceeding to prove the existence of such an expectation, it is proper to describe it in a more particular manner. The coming of the Messiah was an event to which the Jewish nation had long looked forward. The expectation of it pervaded the whole people. Generations lived and died in the certain hope. It was incorporated in all their institutions, customs, domestic interests, feelings and thoughts. In order to ascertain his advent and identify his person, the distinction of tribes and families was most carefully preserved by exact genealogies. If a woman died childless, one of the greatest sources of her lamentations, as she sunk into her grave, was that, by not becoming a mother in Israel, she was excluded from the chance of being enrolled in that envied line from which the Messiah was to spring. When a male child was born into the world the hearts of its parents silently beat with a hope, too great for utterance, too glorious almost to be consciously indulged, that it might be his high lot to restore and redeem Israel, or, if not, to witness its restoration and redemption. Protracted life, length of days, was to the Jews an object of peculiar desire, because they would thus be brought nearer to the Messiah's time, and who could tell but that before their aged eyes were closed in death, the blessed light of his coming might beam upon them. In a word, this assured hope entered into all the literature of the Jews, gave its characteristic stamp to their national spirit, and was the topic of daily conversation in every family, and of hourly reflection in every breast.

We are now brought to the point which it is the purpose of the present discussion to establish. The substance of the prophetical argument, as an evidence of christianity, is found in this *universal expectation* of an entire nation, transmitted from generation to generation, and believed, by those who cherished it, to be derived from divine communications made to their fathers through prophets.

Such an expectation, so wonderfully fulfilled, fulfilled too, in a higher sense than was imagined by the people who entertained it, and even against their most powerful and embittered opposition, constitutes the basis of the prophetical evidence. If such an expectation could be proved to have existed by other tes-

timony, the argument would have remained equally strong, even if the books, which were believed to contain the particular prophecies from which it was originally derived, had been lost in the darkness of remote antiquity. It is evident, therefore, *a fortiori*, that whatever difficulties men may find in interpreting the Jewish scriptures, or whatever opinions they may hold respecting the claims of particular passages to be considered prophetic, or of particular authors to be regarded as prophets, if they admit the existence of such an expectation as I have just described, they allow all that is needed for the prophetic argument. For it is clearly a matter of indifference in what form, or where, a prophecy is preserved, whether in particular books, or in the sentiments of a people. If it is once established that such a degree of foreknowledge, as plainly transcends the natural faculties of man, actually existed, the belief of a supernatural communication necessarily follows, and the evidence of prophecy becomes complete. The evidence, in point of fact, is strengthened, where the prediction is uttered, as in the case before us, by an entire nation, rather than solely by the mouths of a few individual prophets. From the inherent unavoidable ambiguity of language, it is difficult to be sure of the interpretation of the expressions of any one writer. But where a sentiment is inscribed on the whole structure of a nation's usages and institutions, and is expressed with absolute unanimity, in all the forms, most of which are more significant than words themselves, of the habits, feelings, and national character of a whole people, from generation to generation, and from century to century, there is, in truth, no room left for critical differences, or doubtful interpretations.

To prove that such an expectation existed, for ages before the coming of Christ, is all that is required, then, for the purposes of my argument. To that proof I proceed. The first and principal step in the proof is the *antiquity* of the Jewish scriptures, for whatever views may be held respecting the inspiration of their authors, I presume that all will admit that, considered as *literary monuments*, those scriptures bear evidence that such an expectation was entertained, at the periods of their composition, both by their authors and by the people among and to whom they wrote.

If I shall succeed in carrying them back to a period long anterior to the age of Christ, and in showing that they prove the existence, at the time of their production, of such an expectation, then the inquirer must meet the alternative, and either admit that the expectation was derived from a divine communication, or take the ground that it was the result of the natural operation of the common laws of the human mind ; which latter supposition will be much more difficult than that usually made by unbelievers, who, to meet the argument, as commonly presented in reference to prophecy, have maintained that the passages, supposed to be prophetic, in the Hebrew scriptures, were nothing more than the natural conjectures and expectations of their authors, when highly wrought up by poetical enthusiasm and the spirit of patriotism. That such predictions should have been uttered by several Jewish writers, is, under all the circumstances of the case, sufficiently wonderful ; but that the same ideas expressed by them, should have been held, *as a sure and certain expectation*, by a WHOLE NATION, for generations and centuries, without a single dissenter or doubter, is, if possible, a much more wonderful and extraordinary fact, and still more strongly calls for the interposition of *divine wisdom and agency*, to account for its origin, diffusion, and transmission. It will require a greater effort of ingenuity to explain the existence of such ideas, throughout an entire nation, than to explain their expression by a few writers. The attempt to do either will be found impracticable ; and the longer the subject is considered, in all its lights, the more fixed must the conclusion become, in every thoughtful and candid mind, that the expectation *could not have been derived from human wisdom*, and that the accomplishment must be ascribed to the POWER OF GOD.

SECTION IV. — HISTORICAL EVIDENCE.

The question before us is — How can we prove that the books of our sacred canon have descended from that high antiquity to which they lay claim ?

The point at which we start is this—Here is the bible—we know that it exists now ; and taking our departure from the present moment, we are to move up

against the stream of time, carrying our bible with us, and tracing the impressions it has left upon every generation and century, until we reach the period of its origin.

But the unbeliever resists us at the very first step ; and disputes the value of all historical evidence whatever. He refuses to allow that there can be any foundation for belief beyond the boundaries of our own personal experience. It has been correctly observed that it is to this point that infidelity is at length actually driven down. If it can be dislodged from this position, its advocates well know that all further resistance will be in vain.

Now it can be shown, in a very few words, that a more unphilosophical principle cannot be imagined, than this — of not believing any thing except what is taught by our own experience, or by the evidence of our senses — for there is no reason in the world why a greater share of confidence should be placed in them than in the other sources of human knowledge. It may safely be said that, *at least an equal* degree of uncertainty hangs over them. Our senses deceive us as often as testimony deceives us — our own personal experience is quite as delusory as the information we receive from others.

Indeed, it is ascertained by a strict and careful analysis, that the whole system of the perceptions, arising from the functions of sense, is originally founded upon conjecture, fancy, and illusion. The first perceptions of sight, for instance, are all illusory. If a person, who was born blind, from before whose sunken and rayless eyeballs the dark curtain had never been lifted, should be placed where I now stand, and a superhuman power, such as was exercised by the founder of our religion, should appear in the midst of us, and lift the lid, and pour in the light upon the visual organs of the blind man. Would he then, with all the functions of the sense in mature perfection, while gazing for the first moment upon the scene, derive true and just ideas from its contemplation ? No. His senses would utterly mislead him. Those boasted guides to knowledge, and evidences of truth, would conduct him only into error and deception. While standing here in this pulpit, he would look out upon the whole surrounding specta-

cle — upon this broad o'erhanging ceiling — upon that spacious orchestra — upon those extending and receding galleries, and upon this dense throng of human countenances — as upon a dead level. Instead of their appearing at various distances, as they do to us who by long practice have acquired the power of judging of distance, every object of vision would seem to him to touch and press upon his eyeballs.*

It is only by the exercise of those faculties by which we form inferences and deductions, — the very faculties we employ in extending our knowledge over the distant and the past, — that we correct the delusive perceptions of sense, and arrive at the truth. So, the blind man restored to sight, would gradually acquire the power of judging of shapes and dimensions by the blending and shading of colors, and of distances by an unconscious, rapid, and exceedingly subtle comparison, computation, and calculation of the magnitudes and forms of intervening and surrounding objects.

The accuracy of that portion of our knowledge which we derive from the perceptions of sight depends therefore wholly upon the previous and accompanying use of those faculties of reason by which we judge of the probable, draw inferences, and form conjectures — which are, after all, the very same by which we weigh *historical* evidence. So also with the other perceptions of sense. The art of ventriloquism consists in the faculty of producing by certain muscular efforts, sounds which utterly delude and mislead the sense of hearing. There are in fact innumerable ways in which the senses are deceived. Instances are occurring every day, and will no doubt rise to the recollection of all who hear me.

It is well known, too, that while some ingenious philosophers have endeavored to resolve every thing into matter, thus annihilating mind, as distinct from organization, others again have established theories upon the basis that all the perceptions of sense are visionary, thus banishing matter from the regions of existence. In this way, have they given a practical proof that we

* The substance of this argument was originally delivered in the Tabernacle Church, as part of a lecture in a course on the Evidences of Christianity, prepared at the request of the young men of Salem, by the ministers of the place, of different denominations.

are equally liable to delusion while resting upon the evidences of sense, as when relying upon any other kind of evidence by which the mind is led to form conclusions. The truth is that our judgments, whatever may be the *kind* of evidence upon which they rest, are always fallible ; and the sound philosophical principle is this — It is not the *species* of evidence that constitutes its strength, but the *character* and *degree* of it.

The ground upon which the sceptic has placed himself is, therefore, not only narrow and contracted, it is as loose and shifting, nay it is more so, than that upon which the believer stands. For while it is no better, in the abstract, as a foundation of belief, than any other, it is entirely destitute of the sustaining circumstances upon which evidence of all kinds equally depends for its strength. He who denies or doubts every thing, no matter how well attested, except what is taught by his own experience and observation, does not, in so doing, rescue his mind in the least degree from error or uncertainty, but, on the contrary, in many cases, flies from an abode founded upon an immoveable rock, and builds his house upon the fluctuating sand.

In other words, historical testimony is frequently actually better than the evidence of the senses. A plain and simple illustration will satisfy you of the truth of this proposition. I presume that but a very small proportion of this audience have ever visited the city of London, and that most of you in passing through the streets as you walked to the house of God, observed friends and acquaintances. Now I ask those of you who have not been in London, but who saw persons whom you knew, not half an hour since in the street, to examine your own minds and determine which belief is the strongest, that there is such a city as London, or that you met certain particular persons this evening, on your way to this house. You will find, I think, that you believe the former with a more certain faith than you do the latter. For although you might feel prepared to go into court, and make oath of the latter, still you are aware that it is within the circle of *possibilities* that you were deceived. Some one may have artfully disguised himself so as to counterfeit the appearance of the person whom you thought you met ; or it might have been some one else, wholly unknown to you, who

so perfectly resembles him in countenance, shape, dress and walk as to be mistaken for him. But I do not hesitate to say that it is absolutely impossible for you to doubt the existence of the city of London. You cannot force your minds into a state of uncertainty about it, by any process short of that which would crush into ruin all their rational faculties.

But the kind of evidence through which you believe that there *is* such a place as London, is the same through which you believe that there *was* such a place fifty or an hundred years ago ; and this is *historical evidence*. Historical evidence, therefore, may even be stronger than the evidence of personal observation and experience — of the senses themselves.

SECTION V.—AUTHENTICITY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

Having vindicated the credit, and established the claims, of historical testimony, let us again commence our retrograde progress towards antiquity.

The same kind of evidence by which we ascend one hundred, conducts us with equal certainty over one thousand years. It consists of elements too numerous to be mentioned — of a complicated tissue of printed and written records, connecting, overlapping, and crossing each other in such a variety of directions and modes, that it is impossible to separate them at any point in the progress. The religion, and with it the scriptures, are inserted as an essential ingredient into the philosophy, the poetry, the literature, the superstitions, the manners and customs, and all the institutions of the modern nations ; and their previous existence is attested by actual monuments, such as corroded and mouldering coins, and venerable cathedrals, whose dilapidated and crumbling, but massive and time-worn walls bear witness to the lapse of centuries upon centuries. Among the most important monuments of the antiquity of the sacred writings are also to be reckoned the manuscript copies of them which have come down to us from an early period. They are greater in number than those of any other ancient writings ; have been preserved and discovered in all parts of christendom ; and bear the indisputable marks of a very great age. From these manuscripts, from the ancient ver-

sions, and from extracts from scripture contained in writings of acknowledged antiquity, an argument might easily be framed, by which the bible could be carried back to the very period from which its books are dated. But as such an argument would necessarily involve a minute detail, and would be manifestly too intricate for our present purpose, I shall not avail myself of it any farther than to observe that since the revival of letters in Europe, it is obvious that it has been utterly impossible that such an immense body of literature could have been fabricated and fraudulently imposed upon the world, and that the ennumerable manuscripts and records of our sacred books which existed before the invention of printing, must have been transmitted down from a period preceding the revival of learning. Borne on by this kind of evidence, which none, it is probable, would pretend to impeach, we are carried over the borders and into the midst of the dark ages. At this point, perhaps, the sceptic will turn, and refuse to accompany us any further. He will say that our religion and its scriptures, and all the ancient books that refer to the religion, or contain extracts from the scriptures, were contrived and fabricated in this period of universal ignorance, superstition, and credulity ; and he will take this stand, notwithstanding the extravagance of the supposition it involves, more confidently, from the belief that we shall not be able to trace clearly the continuous descent of the bible through a period which was so enshrouded in darkness that no track can be discerned within it, and no landmark or monument seen through it. But his confidence is vain.

Providence has afforded the means by which, in a most remarkable manner, it can be demonstrated that the bible existed, in its present canon, before the dark ages commenced.

When one particular item of this evidence shall have been exhibited, your hearts will be filled with gratitude, and your minds with adoring admiration of that overruling goodness and wisdom by which the records of our faith have been brought in safety through perils which threatened to destroy them, and sheltered from the fury of that storm which overwhelmed so many of the most valuable monuments of ancient learning and genius.

Our ecclesiastical historians give an account of the

convocation of a great Council of Christian Churches at the city of Nice in Bythynia, about midway between the city of Constantinople, and the site of ancient Troy, in the early part of the fourth century, in less than three hundred years after the death of Christ, nearly two hundred years before the fall of the ancient Roman Empire, within fifty years of the death of Longinus, the celebrated Rhetorician, while literature and refinement were at their height, and long before the dark ages commenced.

Now if we can demonstrate, by other evidence, that such a council was actually held at the said time and place, we shall obtain the means of verifying and authenticating the scriptures from that date to the present hour, and also of carrying them back to the time when they profess to have been written.

We shall establish the integrity of the scriptures from that time to the present ; because the same historical writings, which record the holding of the council, inform us that it was convened for the purpose of settling certain important questions of doctrine which had then for some time been convulsing the christian church. Many of these questions are still discussed with great earnestness among us, and have been the cause of division and strife from that day to this. The council of Nice, we are informed, was the scene of a vigorous discussion of them. Bishops and churches ranged themselves on opposite sides. Old Eusebius contended with young Athanasius. The voice of Alexandria was raised against that of Nicomedia ; and two long months were well nigh exhausted before the debate was brought to a close.

If, then, the records of the council of Nice can be shown to be correct, a state of facts will be exhibited, as existing at that early period, which will assure us that no *essential* addition, or alteration, or corruption can since have been made in the canon of our scriptures ; and thus we shall have carried the bible in safety through the dark ages. For a division of the christian world into conflicting sects and parties from the first centuries to the present time, has been accompanied with this good effect—it has rendered any material alteration of the scriptures absolutely impossible. It is obvious that if the christian church had been united by

a perfect harmony, from the beginning, it would have been difficult to *prove* that the scriptures had not, at any time, by mutual agreement been altered to promote what all might have thought a desirable end. But in that state of controversy and party-jealousy which, if the accounts of the council of Nice are correct, has extended back from the present moment even to the first centuries of the church, it has manifestly been utterly impossible for any sect or interest to have altered in any material or noticeable manner the records of the faith. Each sect has been an ever-wakeful, quick-sighted, and suspicious sentinel guarding the common charter and covenant from the assaults, or approaches of every other sect.

We often lament the divisions which have existed in every age of the church, and the unbeliever casts reproach upon us for our controversies, and asserts that if our religion had proceeded from heaven, so much occasion would not have been left for differences of opinion respecting its doctrines. But how true it is that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."! The very differences and divisions, which if we could have controlled events, would have been avoided or forbidden, have preserved the purity of the fountains of christian truth. As discords, in the natural world are made, by its author, to result in final and universal harmony and peace, so in the moral and religious world he educes a steady and ultimate good out of all the evils to which the passions of man may have given rise. Instead of being consumed, the records of the gospel have come down to us purified and brightened by the fires through which they have constantly passed.

We demonstrate therefore, most clearly, if the accounts of the holding of the council of Nice are correct, that the scriptures existed in their present form at the commencement of the fourth century.

But we prove much more than this, if that fact be admitted. For the same records, which speak of this council, inform us that eminent ministers of christian churches were assembled there from all parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa, that more than three hundred Bishops were present, and besides them more than two thousand inferior ecclesiastics and delegates representing the wide-spread christian church, as it then existed

in Syria, Phœnicia, Arabia, India, Persia, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Alexandria and Thebes, and other places in Egypt, Lybia, Pontus, Galatia, Pamphylia, Cappadocia, Phrygia, Cyprus, Macedonia, Rome, France, Spain, and Britain. "Of the ministers of God here assembled," says Eusebius, "some for their sage and sober speech, some for their gravitie of life, and some for patience in adversitie, were highly commended. There were of these not a few, who for their old years and ancient days were highly honored."

If then, within three hundred years after the death of Christ, his church was thus diffused over the whole known world, the sceptic is reduced to this dilemma — he must either admit that the christian religion had reached this truly wonderful extent in a less period than three hundred years ; and if he takes this ground he strengthens the argument, already so strong, as, when fully considered, to be irresistible, drawn from the rapid early diffusion of the gospel — or he must allow us to go back without interruption, until we reach the commencement of the christian era. And if the origin of the religion could not have been later than that assigned to it by christians, it is manifest that the scriptures, upon which the religion rests, must have been written and published as early as the first age of the church.

These great results must be allowed to follow, that is, the integrity of the scriptures of the New Testament, from the beginning of the fourth century to this hour, and from that period back to the time when they profess to have been written, must be admitted, provided it can be proved that such a Council as is described, was held at the time and place alleged. I now proceed to prove it.

Near the close of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese navigators, by doubling the Cape of Good Hope, unbarred the portals of the Indian Ocean, and disclosed, for the first time, to an admiring world, the fertile, populous, luxuriant, and palmy regions stretched around its verdant and fragrant shores. They sailed along the eastern coasts of Africa, crossed the Arabian sea, and landed on the western shores of Hindostan. And there, at a considerable distance from the sea, and within the fastnesses of the mountains of India, they discovered a

community whose worship was offered in temples dedicated to the religion of Jesus Christ, and in the same language spoken by him while on earth, who had never heard of the Inquisition, and had never felt the power of the Pope of Rome. In that sequestered region they had been secluded for twelve centuries, and there they dwell to this day, a living monument of the early ages of the church. While the long night of darkness was brooding over Europe, a mild and heavenly radiance was beaming from the pure word of God, among the mountains of Hindostan, in the heart of Asia. The sacred flame was never altogether extinguished. While it was flickering and expiring on one continent, it was burning brightly upon another.

At their first settlement in India, these christians procured certain privileges and pledges from the native princes, which were engraven upon tablets of brass, and have been preserved with the utmost care to this day, as an imperishable charter of their rights, and memorial of the date and circumstances of their introduction to Hindostan.

Dr. Claudius Buchanan, a native of Scotland, and one of the Heads of the College of Fort William, in Bengal, in the year 1806, penetrated into their mountainous retreats, and explored their condition. As he approached their settlements, he heard the sound of their church bells, resounding among the hills; and we can fully enter into his feelings when he informs us that as the hallowed tones fell upon the evening air, his heart was transported to the highland scenery, and overwhelmed with the dear and sacred associations of his own far distant christian home.

Upon inquiring for their scriptures, they produced a copy of the Old and New Testaments, recorded upon parchment; and when their patriarch placed it in Dr. Buchanan's hands, he said, "we have kept it, as some think, for near a thousand years." The state of the material upon which it was inscribed fully sustained this opinion. Upon examination it was found to contain the books collected in our Bibles, with the single exception of the book of Revelation.

As a striking proof of the great antiquity of this manuscript, I would mention a fact which also illustrates the importance of the learned labors of modern criti-

cism. Dr. Kennicott, a most distinguished Hebrew scholar, upon a careful examination of the considerations that belonged to the case, concluded that in a certain verse in Genesis,* a slight omission had accidentally occurred, through the carelessness of some very ancient transcriber. All the Hebrew manuscripts then known to exist, contained the text in what he judged to be its defective state. Upon opening this copy of the Bible, nearly forty years after Kennicott had published his work, it was found to contain the reading conjectured by him, thus confirming his opinion, and securing to itself a title to a greater antiquity than any existing copy of the Hebrew Scriptures, inasmuch as all of them were written after the text, at that particular place, had become corrupted.

Dr. Buchanan mentions another circumstance which tends strongly to prove that these Indian churches left christendom as early as the fourth century. It is well known to all who hear me, that a certain passage found in the first epistle of John, as it appears in our common version, chapter 5, verse 7, and which was long regarded as the principal proof text of the doctrine of the Trinity, is an interpolation, fraudulently inserted into the text. Although it is the only passage which even seems to allude to such a notion as that of the Trinity, it is generally freely acknowledged to be a forgery. It is worthy of remark that it has not been quoted at all in the recent attempt to maintain the cause of orthodoxy in this place.† Jerome, who lived in the fourth century, is supposed by Sir Isaac Newton to have been the first person who ever inserted it in the Bible.

This text was not found in any copy examined by Dr. Buchanan in India. Their scriptures, therefore, we may be sure, were brought from christendom before that spurious passage had obtained possession of the place it still occupies in our Bibles.

Dr. Buchanan also mentions another circumstance which seems to indicate that they were separated from the rest of the christian world at a very early period.

* Genesis iv. 8.

† See articles in the Salem Gazette, under the signature of "A Lover of Cudworth and Truth."

They do not appear to have ever heard of baptism by immersion, until he informed them that a sect existed in Europe and America, who insisted upon that mode as an essential article.

Dr. Buchanan gives the most pleasing descriptions of the situation and character of these interesting christians. "The face of the country in the vicinity of the mountains, exhibits a varied scene of hill and dale and winding streams. These streams fall from the mountains and preserve the vallies in perpetual verdure. The woods produce pepper, cardamoms, and cassia, or common cinnamon; also frankincense and other aromatic gums. What adds much to the grandeur of the scenery in this country is, that the adjacent mountains of Travancore are not barren, but are covered with forests of teak wood (the Indian oak) producing, it is said, the largest timber in the world." — "They received me with confidence and affection, and the people of the neighhoring villages came round me, women as well as men. The sight of the WOMEN assured me that I was once more in a christian country. For the Hindoo women and the Mahomedan women, and in short, all women who are not christians, are accounted by the men an inferior race. In every countenance now before me I thought I could discover the intelligence of christianity. But, at the same time, I perceived all around, symptoms of poverty and political depression. In the churches, and in the people, there was an air of fallen greatness. I said to the senior Priest, 'you appear to me like a people who have known better days.' 'It is even so,' said he 'we are in a degenerate state, compared with our forefathers.' "

"I attended divine service on Sunday. Their Liturgy is that which was formerly used in the churches of the Patriarch of Antioch. During the prayers there were intervals of silence, the priests praying in a low voice, and every man praying for himself. These silent intervals add much to the solemnity and appearance of devotion. They use incense in the churches. It grows in the woods around them, and contributes much, they say, to health, and to the warmth and comfort of the church during the cold and rainy season of the year. At the conclusion of the service the Priest comes forward, and all the people pass by him as they

go out, receiving his benediction individually." The principal Priest "was dressed in a vestment of dark red silk ; a large golden cross hung from his neck, and his venerable beard reached below his girdle."—"The character of these people," says another traveller, "is marked by a striking superiority over the heathens, in every moral excellence. They are remarkable for their veracity and plain dealing."

They preserve the names which prevailed in the first age of the church. Those most common among them are Matthew, Luke, Thomas, and Philip.

The Hindoo princes in their neighborhood have treated them with great fidelity, and have never interfered with their liberty of conscience. What a melancholy, but what a just reproach it is to christendom, to reflect that they would not have fared so well had they been surrounded with christian governments and churches ! They would undoubtedly have met the fate of the Waldenses. They date the period of their most rapid decline from the arrival of the Portuguese in India. The first thing done by the catholics was to compel their attendance in a synod, at which the following accusations were brought against them :— "That they had married wives ; that they owned but two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper ; that they neither invoked saints, nor worshipped images, nor believed in Purgatory ; and that they had no other orders or names of dignity in the church, than Priest and Deacon." It was then voted that they must abjure these shocking heresies, or be anathematised. To carry this vote into effect, an Inquisition, whose awful history transcends any thing in the records of catholic cruelty in Spain or Italy, was forthwith established in Goa, and a large part of these poor and unfortunate churches were soon tortured and burned into a state of orthodox conformity. Those however within the interior mountains were enabled to resist successfully these missionary operations, and still preserve their ancient liberty and condition.

Dr. Buchanan thus describes his feelings when he first inspected the copies of the scriptures preserved by these interesting descendants of a long lost branch of the primitive church :

"The view of these copies of the scriptures, and of

the churches which contain them, still continues to excite a pleasing astonishment in my mind ; and I sometimes question myself whether I am indeed in India, in the midst of the Hindoos. How wonderful it is, that during the dark ages of Europe, whilst ignorance and superstition denied the scriptures to the rest of the world, the Bible should have found an asylum in the mountains of Malay-ala, where it was read by upwards of a hundred churches." When the bearing of the fact of the early sequestration and continued existence of these churches upon our argument is considered, we also are led to exclaim, how wonderful was that Providence, which deposited within the remote and unknown recesses of India, the records and institutions of the early church, so that when every star had gone down, and every ray was extinguished over the face of Europe, the oracles of God were placed beyond the reach of barbarism and corruption, and reserved, as it were, to assure us that they have descended to our times uninjured by the ages through which they have passed !

That branch of the Syrian church, which, being established in Hindostan, was distinguished as the church of India, may be considered as having taken its departure from the christian world, at the breaking up of the Council of Nice. It was represented in that body, and among the names subscribed to its edicts, is John, Bishop of India. They retired from christendom, carrying their scriptures with them, in season to escape the corruption which the union of church and state was beginning to introduce.

In order to show how decisively this Indian church authenticates the records of the Council of Nice, and with them all the other memorials and histories of christian antiquity, I will mention more particularly that several of the earlier ecclesiastical writers, such as Origen, Eusebius, Gregory of Nazianzen, Theodoret, and Osorius, relate that the apostle Thomas personally visited India, and established a line of churches extending from Antioch to those remote regions. The Indian churches are in fact referred to long before the close of the second century. And upon their first discovery in modern times, they were found to hold a universal tradition that the foundations of their churches were laid by the apostle Thomas. They believed, to a

man, that the first missionaries, who ever visited their country with the gospel message of salvation, came from Antioch, and it has ever been their pride and boast that they have descended from the spot where the disciples were first called Christians, a title to which they have, with equal wisdom and fidelity, steadily and exclusively adhered. They have preserved the knowledge of the convocation of that celebrated Council at Nice, in which, as we have seen, their patriarch occupied a seat, and they also believe that the scriptures were possessed in their churches before that event took place.

The copy presented to Dr. Buchanan, and deposited by him in the Library of Cambridge, in England, where it is still to be found, does not, as has already been observed, contain the book of Revelation, although other copies seen by him in that country, did contain it.

We find, accordingly, upon looking at the records of our ecclesiastical history, that at the time when these churches were severed from the christian world, that is, in the fourth century, the Revelation was the only book in our present bibles which had not then obtained admission to the canon. During the first three or four centuries, each single church possessed a greater or less number of writings, claiming an apostolical character. In the copies of the bible handed down from the first centuries, and examined by Dr. Buchanan, in the Indian churches, several books were found, both in the Old and New Testament, which were rejected from the canon soon after the Council of Nice. The early churches gradually enlarged their collections, by adding such books as were well authenticated, and purified them by rejecting such as were found to be unworthy of the distinction, and in this way the canon of the scriptures was slowly formed. It is creditable to the churches of the first centuries, and shows conclusively the discretion, caution, and carefulness they used in this matter, that the researches of critical learning in modern times, have fully confirmed their judgment. No writing omitted from the primitive canon, has reached our day, whose claims, upon the whole, will bear examination ; and none are to be found in our bibles which are not in the character of their contents worthy

of the place they occupy, although there is some degree of uncertainty with regard to the authorship of one or two of them.

We find a few slight and faint indications that the existence of the Indian churches was not entirely forgotten for several centuries after the Council of Nice ; but there is reason to believe that but little, if any, intercourse took place between them and the rest of christendom, from the date of that Council, until they were discovered by the Portuguese, nearly twelve hundred years afterwards. There they lived in the most perfect seclusion, from generation to generation, and from century to century. Their doctrine continued to bear the impress of the age when they were cut off from the rest of the church. And their social and theological position was very much the same as that held by the christian world in the fourth century. While many errors and superstitions had even then crept into the church, it was still pure and apostolical, compared with the condition of christendom a few centuries afterwards.

The ecclesiastical constitution of the Indian churches is in accordance with what may fairly be considered the primitive pattern. They recognise two orders in the ministry, Priests and Deacons, and their churches are all held together by a union under one head, in the character of a moderator, patriarch, or bishop.

There can be but little doubt, it seems to me, that the title of Bishop was applied in the first age of the church to the principal pastor or officer of individual churches, and that where more than one church existed in any place or vicinity, they were frequently led by the pressure of the times, and the exigencies of their situation, to adopt as compact and effectual an organization as possible. In this way the senior pastor of several contiguous churches naturally became their moderator and presiding officer when assembled in association. This was the extent to which Episcopacy existed in the primitive, or in the Indian churches. Nothing can be more extravagant than to claim for such an establishment as the modern English Episcopal Church the sanction of apostolical or primitive usage.

Great caution is to be exercised in reading the ancient ecclesiastical writers, particularly the Greek au-

thors of the primitive centuries. It must not be inferred that, because a particular individual is called the Bishop of a particular city or province, the christians or the churches were therefore very numerous in that quarter. If but a single, and that perhaps a small church, existed in a large city or district, the pastor of that single church was, by the usage of the times, entitled the Bishop of that city or district. The ancient Greek orators of the christian church indulged in language which, if care is not used, will be likely to mislead.

In illustration of this remark, I will quote the interpretation which Robert Robinson, the predecessor of Robert Hall in the Baptist church at Cambridge, in England, and who was altogether worthy of such a successor, puts upon the expressions of Chrysostom in reference to Ignatius, one of the first pastors of the church at Antioch.

Chrysostom describes him as "*Saint Ignatius, archbishop of Antioch,*" as "entrusted by Jesus Christ with the government of a *see* containing two hundred thousand inhabitants." "This *prelate* illumined all Syria; like the sun, he rose in the east, and set in the west."

Such is the language of Chrysostom. Robert Robinson, who, although a great man, was a very plain writer, thus translates it into the simple and actual truth. "The fact," says he, "is this: Ignatius was one honest good man of a congregation of several other men, as honest and good as himself: for the first churches were all saints. This man was born in the east, and died at Rome. He lived sometime at Antioch, a city containing two hundred thousand inhabitants, all whom he governed exactly as, in the reign of Charles II. Jeremiah Ives, who kept a cheesemonger's shop in Red-Cross street, at the corner of New street, and taught an anabaptist congregation in the old Jewry, governed the city of London. He illuminated all the east—that is, during his life time nobody out of Antioch knew him; but after his death somebody published a letter in his name, which for his honor ought to be supposed a forgery. He was an Archbishop; but he had no bishops under him, and his congregation all assembled in one house during his life."

This is the way in which the precedents in favor of such an ecclesiastical establishment as that of our mother country, disappear upon the application of a strict analysis to the meaning of the word, and the character of the office, of a Bishop in the primitive ages of the church. So far as the Episcopal church in America has departed from the constitution of the same church in England, it has undoubtedly approached to a nearer resemblance of the primitive pattern. But, while we readily acknowledge that where several congregations were contiguous, they might sometimes, in a very early day, have been united under the superintendence of bishops or patriarchs, it is probable that almost all reflecting and enlightened christians of the Episcopal communion among us, would feel inclined to maintain and recommend their form of government, as well as their form of service, simply on the ground of expediency, and as a matter of preference in taste. For while they may meet with considerable success when advocating their cause on this ground, there is as little to be said on the subject, drawn from primitive usage, as there is from the language of scripture.

When therefore, we read of the immense concourse of ecclesiastics assembled, and of churches represented, at the Council of Nice, we cannot infer so much the number of the congregations, or the actual amount of population embraced in them, as the wide territorial diffusion of the religion at that early period. It is probable, however, that those persons who are inclined to suspect that Constantine was governed by reasons of State, rather than the force of evidence, in adopting the christian faith, would be willing to admit that he would not have taken that step, had not the new religion previously become the belief of the great mass of his empire.

This, then, is a mere specimen of the evidence by which we demonstrate that the scriptures were collected into the canon as early as the fourth century, and that in three hundred years after the death of Christ they were possessed and read, and appealed to as authority, in churches of believers scattered over all the regions of the then known world, extended far into Asia, and Africa, and Europe, and including a wider

circle than was ever conquered by the arms of Alexander, or overshadowed by the eagles of Rome.*

For proof of the existence of the New Testament scriptures during the interval between the time of their production and the Council of Nice, we can adduce all the evidence of which the case can be imagined to be susceptible. The historians who inform us of the Council of Nice, and whose accuracy and veracity, with respect to that event, have now been demonstrated, assure us also of the existence and authenticity of these scriptures. They are noticed, referred to, quoted, and acknowledged, by different writers, through the entire period. The age was too enlightened, literature was too much regarded, internal divisions and controversies were too numerous, and the enemies of the gospel, both Jew and Gentile, too vigilant and active, to allow the supposition that they could have been forged, and fraudulently imposed upon the world. If they existed, in their present canon, and were universally acknowledged as early as the Council of Nice, it is altogether in vain to attempt to cast doubt or suspicion upon their authenticity, as the productions of the age to which they are ascribed.

The process by which the scriptures of the New Testament were brought into the present canon, can be easily explained. Different churches possessed, as has been remarked, different selections, which were gradually enlarged. First they only had the epistles especially addressed to them. Copies of the gospels were soon afterwards transmitted from one body of believers to another. Whenever christians travelled through places where churches were gathered, they would naturally take pains to procure authentic

* For further knowledge of the history and character of the Syrian Churches, I would refer, in addition to the writings of Dr. Buchanan, to the following works :

Assemanus, Jos. Simon. "Bibliotheca Orientalis, &c." tom. iii. part ii. cap. ix. § ccccxiii.

Croze, M. V. la. "Histoire du Christianisme des Indes."

Clerc, Jean le. "Bibliothèque Universelle". x. 421. xxii. 291.

Beausobre, Isaac de. "Histoire de Mainchée et du Manichéisme" i. 520.

Renaudot, Eusebius. "Ancient Accounts of India and China."

copies of such apostolical writings as would be acquisitions to their own collections, and the frequent Councils held in those ages gave opportunity for the circulation and interchange of well accredited scriptures. It has already been observed that the most scrupulous care was exercised, in weighing the claims of such writings as were offered to their scrutiny and decision, In this way the New Testament was finally collected and established in the confidence of the universal church.

Having authenticated the dates of the New Testament scriptures, it only remains to prove that the Old Testament has come down to us from the ages to which its books are ascribed. No language can exaggerate the value and interest of this division of the bible to the philosophical historian, or to the christian believer. Besides the sublime poetry, wisdom, and eloquence with which its pages are pervaded, and the unspeakable interest attached to the historical events it records, the Old Testament contains the sources of that argument upon which I acknowledge that my mind chiefly relies for the conversion of the world. The prophecies it records present the most decisive evidence that their authors were divinely inspired, and were the messengers of God.

The evidence which demonstrates the uncorrupted descent of the scriptures of the New Testament from the time of their production, proves also the uncorrupted descent of the books of the Old Testament from the same period. And here let me call your particular attention to one of the most remarkable manifestations of that profound and infinite wisdom which presides over the destinies of the church as well as the world !

When we consider the character of Christ, and his deportment and manner as a teacher, in the clear and interesting light in which they are presented in the evangelical scriptures, and when we consider the evidence he was enabled to present of his mission from God, we are filled with astonishment that he did not win the favor and secure the belief of the whole Jewish nation. Their obstinate and fierce rejection of his claims continues to this day to excite the wonder of all who reflect upon the subject. But it was not without a wise design that they were permitted thus to oppose the truth.

In rejecting the Saviour, and in pursuing his religion with unrelenting hostility, and its disciples with unmitigated virulence and hatred, the Jews have rendered themselves the instruments of infinite advantage to the christian cause. If they had received Jesus as their Messiah, and had blended themselves with his church, the unbeliever would then have said that the scriptures had been fabricated and put together to suit the case, that the prophecies in the Old Testament had been accommodated to the events of the Saviour's life, and that the whole bible was the result of a concerted scheme. And it would have been difficult, perhaps, to have refuted the objection. But, it has been wisely ordered, that while christians have preserved the New Testament, the Jews have been the keepers of the old, which has thus descended to us through the hands of the most bitter enemies of the gospel. We may therefore safely conclude that the Hebrew scriptures have never been altered to promote the views of the friends of christianity, and reasonably consider it demonstrated that while in the long continued process of transcription some slight variations and errors have necessarily occurred, no material corruption can have taken place, from the beginning of the christian era, in either division of the scriptures, as both Jews and Christians have kept up such a constant and suspicious watch on each other, that neither party would have dared to have changed a single expression, by which its own interests or views could have been in the least degree promoted. The hostility between them has therefore secured the perpetual preservation of the integrity of the entire bible, since the days of the Savior ; and who can tell but that this was the end for which the Jews have been placed and will be kept in an attitude of hostility to the gospel, until every vestige of infidelity shall have been removed ; and that then, having accomplished the purpose assigned them, they will be gathered in to complete the triumphs of the church, and bring the fulfilment of prophecy to a close ? When the fulness of the Gentiles shall have come in, then, her warfare being finished, her iniquity pardoned, and the end of her desolation accomplished, Jerusalem shall be redeemed, and all Israel be saved. The continued opposition and unbelief of the Jews seems indeed,

from the language of scripture itself, to have been permitted and overruled for the accomplishment of the great design and end of the gospel. How wonderful are the ways of Providence ! How deep are the councils of Heaven !

In this connection I would request the particular attention of those of my hearers, if there are any such among them, whose minds have been led to notice the attempts made by infidel writers of modern times to throw doubt upon the origin of the evangelical narratives.

Let them consider the undisputed, and I presume all will admit, the indisputable fact, that the Jews have from the beginning been hostile to the pretensions of Jesus to the character of their Messiah. Let them bear in mind that this hostility was cherished, in an eminent and most embittered degree by the Scribes and Pharisees, and almost all the learned men of the Jewish nation. Let them remember that among the learned Jews of that day such men as Philo and Josephus were to be found, and that they enjoyed every conceivable facility of detecting and exposing imposture—and then let them inquire whether it is possible to suppose that, if the gospels or other writings contained in the New Testament, had any other time and place of origin than the age and country assigned as the period and the scene of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, and of the first establishment of his church, it would not have been discovered and proclaimed by the Jews ?

The question is this,—and it suggests a conclusive and certain refutation of all the arguments of modern infidels,—Can it be imagined that the Jewish nation would have permitted the scriptures of the New Testament to descend, without dispute, to our times, as authentic records of alleged events in their country at a particular period, if in point of fact those events never occurred, and the scriptures that profess to record them were actually written in another age and a distant country ? No. It will necessarily and forever be impossible, for either a Taylor or a Paine, to persuade rational and reflecting minds that the gospels were written by philosophers in Egypt or by monks in Rome, when such an idea never entered the imagination of a Jewish Scribe, Pharisee, or Rabbi !

It is bad enough to suppose that such a fraud could have been practised upon the faith of the wide-spread christian church ; but when we are required, by our modern infidels, to believe that it was also successfully perpetrated upon intelligent, learned, bitter and vigilant enemies of the gospel, upon the whole Jewish nation, who seem to have been scattered abroad over the earth at that time to act as sentinels and spies upon the christian church, to prevent or detect every attempt to promote its cause by forgery or fraud, and who, even in their dispersion, are known to have preserved their organization under patriarchs for many centuries, and to have established schools of learning, the chief object of which seemed to have been to preserve the purity of their own scriptures, and thus defeat the pretensions of false Messiahs—when we are required to believe that these Jews, without the least resistance, permitted the publication and circulation of writings by the christians, of the falsehood of which, if they were false, every one of them must have been fully acquainted, and that thus they have given their consent and concurrence to a scheme decisive of their own defeat, and of the triumph of a cause which from that day to this they have opposed with the utmost zeal and rancor—when, I say, our modern infidels require us to believe this, they make a demand upon our credulity altogether too monstrous to be endured. No rational, well-balanced, and sane mind can countenance the supposition for a moment.

But this is the ground upon which unbelief, in its blind desperation, has recently planted itself. Convinced, at last, that unless the authenticity of the scriptures can be impeached, all attempts to check the progress of the religion must be unavailing, they have concentrated their assaults upon the bible itself, and have affirmed that the four Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles are forgeries and fictions, and that no such persons as Jesus and his Apostles, ever lived.* How strange it is, that—while this great discovery was per-

* A book entitled, "The Diegesis," written by a man named Robert Taylor, once a clergyman of the English Episcopal Church, and who still retains the title of *Reverend*, maintaining this absurd hypothesis, and filled with the most shocking malignity towards our religion and its founder, has been republished in Boston, and is most

mitted to dawn upon the half-crazed and shattered intellect of an eccentric individual, who has publicly acknowledged himself subject to fits of derangement, in a retired parish in England, and was brought into the perfect light of day before his vision while immured within the walls of a prison—it was concealed for so many centuries from the inhabitants of the country where Jesus performed his public ministry, who have never thought of denying that he actually lived, but on the contrary, have always boasted that they crucified him as a malefactor ! It is indeed too wonderful for us. Our faith cannot be distended wide enough to receive it ! An ancient father of the church, in the extremity of his extravagant superstition, once declared that he believed a certain doctrine, *because* it was impossible. This principle, I trust, has no supporters, at present, among christians ; but it is fully developed and faithfully followed out by the whole class of modern infidels.

In reference to the books of the Old Testament, I shall only glance at the kind of evidence by which they can be carried back, beyond the christian era, to their alleged antiquity. And inasmuch as it would be manifestly impossible, on this occasion, to prove the authenticity of them severally, and as it will be understood that nothing more can be done than to sketch a few of the immense number of proofs that belong to the subject, I shall confine myself to the five books of Moses, or the Pentateuch. As they are supposed by all to be more ancient than any of the others, I presume that if I can carry them back to their alleged date, it will readily be acknowledged that the same might still more easily be done with the later books.

Nearly three hundred years before Christ these books, together with the rest of the Old Testament,

industriously circulated by the zealous infidels of the present day. It has been exposed with great ability in the Christian Examiner for January, 1835. A volume would be needed to notice all its ridiculous blunders and profligate misstatements. In the London Monthly Repository, vol. 13, p. 754, there is an advertisement, quoted from the London Times of Dec. 11, 1818, written in Latin, and signed by this Robert Taylor, in which he recants his previous infidelity, and declares that it was owing to *insanity*. He afterwards relapsed, was convicted of blasphemy, and imprisoned in Oakham Gaol.

were translated into Greek at Alexandria, in Egypt, and thus incorporated into the literature of that language and period.

The next point at which we find them is the Babylonish captivity. This took place nearly six hundred years before Christ, and I will only mention two out of the many proofs that the books of Moses existed previous to it. The language of the Jews underwent a great change during the captivity, but the Pentateuch is written in the ancient idiom and dialect; and the Samaritans, who came in and occupied the land after its inhabitants had been carried captive to Babylon, are found to have recognised and adopted, among other institutions of the conquered country, these five books of Moses, which proves that they were regarded as sacred books previous to the settlement of that people in Judea.

The next point at which I would stop, is the separation of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, which happened nearly one thousand years before Christ. They both preserved the Pentateuch, and their relations to each other were such that it cannot be imagined that they would have done this, had they not, previous to their separation, been educated with a profound reverence for the books of the law.

Another political event carries us back within four hundred years of the time of Moses himself. I refer to the adoption of the regal government in Judea. If the Pentateuch had been fabricated after this event, in order to gain the national favor, it would necessarily have been adapted to a monarchical form of government. But, in point of fact, it recommends a totally different form. It was in absolute violation of its letter and spirit that kings ever reigned in Judah.

Besides such proof as this, it can be shown from the character of the law of Moses, the observances it enjoins, and the institutions it upholds, that it could not have had a later origin than that assigned to it.

The requirements of the Jewish code were such that it can hardly be imagined that they could have been enforced by any authority short of a divine decree so manifest and decisive that none could dispute or doubt it. No people voluntarily would have imposed upon themselves such sacrifices and have assumed such bur-

dens as were enjoined upon the Jews ; and no impostor would have attempted to establish his authority by the use of means which, as in the case of the Mosaic institutions, would array against him all the passions, prejudices and interests of the people whom he aspired to govern.

The Jewish history, as given in the Pentateuch, is founded upon the fact that the nation came into possession of the country it inhabited by conquering and driving out the original occupants of the soil ; and we find, that their laws and usages were precisely such, as could only have been established in a country thus conquered and occupied. The arrangements respecting property were of this description ; such, for instance as the release from debts and personal servitude every seventh year, and the restoration of all private property into a common stock every fiftieth year. He who considers with what extreme difficulty governments are enabled to change the tenure or control the movements of property, will be convinced that such laws as these could not have been established, at any other time, that at the moment of entering upon an unoccupied country, and before it had been distributed to individuals. The same considerations are suggested by the appropriation of the six cities of refuge to persons who had unintentionally committed manslaughter, and of the forty eight cities to the Levites, who were also forbidden to hold any other landed property. A vast variety of such instances might be adduced to show that the internal regulations and institutions of the Jewish nation prove the truth of their history as given by Moses. But enough, I presume, has been exhibited to satisfy every mind.

I will conclude, therefore, this rapid sketch by presenting the following recapitulation and summary. The Book of the Law, which Moses commanded the Levites to preserve in the Ark of the Covenant, and which by his order was solemnly read at stated intervals, in the presence of the assembled nation,* was the same translated by the seventy at Alexandria, adopted by the Samaritans at the captivity, received as sacred by both Judah and Israel, at their separation, published before a

* Deut. xxxi. 9—30.

king reigned in Israel, made the foundation of institutions and usages which must have preceded all these events and changes for centuries, and acknowledged in every possible form and manner by all antiquity from the time of their author until the downfall of the Roman Empire.

The sketch just presented of the argument by which the antiquity of the books of Moses is proved, is condensed from "Graves's Lectures on the Pentateuch." I am aware that there is considerable difference of opinion among learned christian writers, respecting the periods of composition of several books of the Old Testament. Some are disposed to dispute the alleged antiquity of a portion of them, and others are disinclined to ascribe to any of them so high an antiquity as is commonly claimed. In order to keep my argument on ground which all will acknowledge to be impregnable, I will acquiesce in the latest date that can be assigned to any of them, and will content myself in carrying them back to a period not far removed from the Babylonish captivity. It will not be denied by any one that they were in existence soon after that event, and this is all my plan of argument requires. It will be proper, however, to glance at a few of the other evidences of the great antiquity of the Jewish scriptures, besides those drawn from the civil and political history and institutions of that nation.

Dr. Buchanan and others, including the great name of Sir William Jones, have found remnants of Jewish tribes in the interior of India, who had evidently been planted there long before the christian era, and some of whom had preserved their scriptures, particularly the Pentateuch, with the most sacred care.

Institutions, manners, and sentiments which can be attributed to no other origin than to the state and form of society described in the Hebrew scriptures, have been traced in the early history and traditions of every country in Asia and Africa, and have been discovered by such observers as Captain Cook and Sir Joseph Banks even in the central Islands of the Pacific Ocean.

It is indeed well known to every person who has extended his inquiries into the traditions and usages of the Asiatic and African races, as they have been made

known to us by modern travellers and historians, that in all directions the apparent traces are to be found, in greater or less degrees of distinctness, of a Hebrew origin. It has even been maintained that the aboriginal inhabitants of this continent had originally proceeded from that source. Without deciding either for or against this theory, it is but proper to state that many ingenious and learned writers have espoused it, and have adduced in its support a variety of evidence, which is in several respects curious and striking.

It is a very remarkable fact, among others to the same point, that the American Indians were found to possess and to preserve with sacred care, as the receptacle of the presence of their deities, a chest or box of a particular conformation, which in its size and shape resembled the Jewish Ark of the Covenant.* I will mention another fact, which taken in connection with that now given, will seem to countenance the theory that our continent was peopled, as some writers have supposed, by a gradual transmigration from Island to Island over the Pacific from Asia to America, and that these daring and adventurous voyagers were of Jewish extraction,---the principal branch, perhaps, of the ten tribes, whose history has exercised so much ingenious curiosity and still continues to be enshrouded in impenetrable darkness. The fact has been already alluded to, and is narrated in the following extract from Hawkesworth's account of one of Cook's voyages among the Pacific Islands. Mr., afterwards Sir Joseph, Banks, then a young man, accompanied Captain Cook on this expedition :

“ We went again ashore on the 18th, and would have taken the advantage of Tupia's company in our perambulation, but he was too much engaged with his friends ; we took, however, his boy, whose name was Tayeto, and Mr. Banks went to take a further view of what had much engaged his attention before ; it was a kind of chest or ark, the lid of which was nicely sewed in, and thatched very neatly with palm-nut leaves : it was fixed upon two poles, and supported on little arches of wood, very neatly carved ; the use of the poles seemed to be to remove it from place to place,

* See “ A Star in the West,” by Elias Boudinot, LL.D., p. 176.

in the manner of our sedan chairs ; in one end of it was a square hole, in the middle of which was a ring touching the sides, and leaving the angles open, so as to form a round hole within a square one. — The general resemblance between this repository and the Ark of the Lord among the Jews is remarkable ; but it is still more remarkable, that upon inquiring of the boy what it was called, he said, “ Ewhaue no Eatua,” the *house of the God* : he could, however, give no account of its signification or use.” Vol. 3, p. 108.

It is supposed, I believe, by most writers, that the inhabitants of the Pacific Islands are of Asiatic origin. The American tribes appear to bear a general resemblance to that great division of the human family, with the single exception of the Esquimaux Indians who indicate a probable origin from the North of Europe. If then this continent has chiefly been peopled by a transportation from Asia over the intermediate Islands in the Pacific, there is no intrinsic improbability in the supposition that such an adventurous transmigration was performed by the tribes of Abraham, who after being driven from their own land found no resting place in Asia, and were not stayed in their wanderings until they had traversed the broad ocean and become diffused over the continent of America. This, however, in the present state of our knowledge, is at best but a pleasing speculation. It is only necessary to our argument to collect the inference, to which none I presume can object, that the more remote, whether in time or place, the indications, that may be found, of Jewish customs or sentiments, the stronger is the argument in favor of the antiquity of the nation from which they were derived.

We also find just such evidence, as might be expected, in the literature and philosophy of the ancient heathens, of the contemporaneous and previous existence of the Jewish religion and scriptures. The system of the Mosaic polity, both civil and sacred, was so contrived, for wise purposes, as to draw a veil, as it were, between the Israelites and other nations. It was owing to this cause that the sublime literature of the ancient scriptures continued comparatively unknown to the early classical writers. But notwithstanding the difficulties thus thrown in their way, many inquisitive

philosophers, in wandering, according to the custom of those days, from region to region in pursuit of wisdom and truth, actually succeeded in obtaining some insight of the mysteries of the Jewish worship and belief. It is the opinion of many, and appears to be reasonable and just, that Plato's system of divinity was founded upon such views as a foreign traveller would be apt to take of the Hebrew scriptures hastily inspected and imperfectly understood. And the eastern sages, with Zoroaster at their head, evidently borrowed largely from the same source.

The unbeliever attempts by reversing this argument to escape from its operation. He says that the Jewish writers borrowed from the heathen writers. The facts are these. The books of Moses by universal admission are older than any of the remains of classical antiquity, either Greek or Roman. And although some of the oriental nations make great pretensions to antiquity on the part of their sacred writings, they are utterly unable to authenticate them by the least degree of external or internal evidence. It is evident too that, in their chronology, they have indulged the same wild and extravagant passion for exaggeration, which marks all their literature, thoughts, and sentiments.

The impression seems getting to be prevalent among cautious and considerate scholars, that in ascribing a very great antiquity, beyond the christian era for instance, to the sacred books of the oriental systems of religion, merely upon the strength of the unauthenticated traditions of an ignorant but exceedingly fanciful and superstitious populace or priesthood, some of our own writers, and perhaps one might say even Sir William Jones himself, have been altogether too hasty.

At any rate, it must be admitted, that the unbeliever, in attempting to fix upon the Hebrew writers the charge of having borrowed from heathen authors those passages and declarations which they professed to utter as predictions suggested by the direct operation of the spirit of God, is guilty of the folly and absurdity of claiming for writings which cannot be proved to be more than *one* thousand years old, a greater antiquity than for writings which can be proved to be more than *two* thousand years old.

But without referring to dates or ages, we only ask

the candid inquirer to compare the writings ascribed to Zoroaster, or any other ancient heathen, with the writings of the Old Testament, and regarding only the style of thought, narrative, reasoning, or diction, to say which bears the clearest and brightest marks of a high and primitive antiquity. Let every fair and intelligent reader determine for himself. We fear not to abide the issue of his judgment.

SEC. VI. PROPHECY UTTERED BY ALL JUDEA.

Having, I trust satisfactorily, shown that the scriptures of the New Testament were written at the period usually assigned to them, and that the scriptures of the Old Testament were written many centuries before the coming of Christ, all that is necessary, to exhibit the prophetical argument, in its true form, and proper force, is to prove the following proposition.

At the period of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the whole Jewish nation were in expectation of his advent, which expectation had existed for centuries throughout their country, and was declared by all who cherished it, to be founded upon the promise of God uttered by the voice of prophets.

The New Testament scriptures establish the fact of the prevalence of the expectation, at, and immediately before, the birth of Christ. I will present a few out of the many passages to this effect scattered through them. The message sent to John the Baptist by the Jews and his answer display the expectation. "And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent Priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not THE CHRIST."* Luke expressly declares that "the people were in expectation," and that "all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not."† The same idea is apparent in the petition of the mother of Zebedee's children,‡ and in the speculations of the disciples concerning their respective prospects of personal elevation in the Messiah's kingdom.|| It was also proclaimed in the shouts of triumph with which Jesus is represented to have been welcom-

*John i. 19. †Luke iii, 15. ‡Matt. xx. 20. ||Luke ix. 46.

ed by the people to Jerusalem. "On the next day, much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm-trees and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna ; Blessed is the King of Israel, that cometh in the name of the Lord."* When Jesus had performed the miracle of multiplying the loaves and fishes, the people said "This is of a truth THAT PROPHET that should come into the world.†

The expectation prevailed among the Samaritans as well as the Jews, as is shown by the conversation of the woman of Samaria, "I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ ; when he is come he will tell us all things."‡

But it is not merely in scattered passages that we find evidence of the prevalence of this expectation. The whole surface of the New Testament bears witness to it. It is every where spoken of, or alluded to, precisely in such a manner as proves that it was universally entertained. The message from John the Baptist to Jesus is an instance. The idea was so familiar that it needed no particularity of description. "Art thou HE that should come, or do we look for another."||

It is proper to mention, that the New Testament scriptures prove, what has been asserted in a previous stage of this discussion, that it was understood by the Jews, that the reign of their Messiah would be illustrated, in its final consummation, by its moral triumphs. While they erroneously imagined that he would achieve his dominion by the use of military force, they never lost sight of the real nature of his kingdom, after it should have become established. This is manifest from the language of Zacharias, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel ; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us, in the house of his servant David ; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets ; which have been since the world began ; that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us ; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remem-

*John xxii. 12, 13. Matt. xxi. 8, 9. †John vi. 14, 15.

‡John iv. 25. ||Matt. xi. 3. Luke vii. 19, 20.

ber his holy covenant ; the oath which he sware to our father Abraham ; that he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him, without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.”*

But we do not rely exclusively upon the books of the New Testament to prove the prevalence of this expectation, at the commencement of the christian era. Providence seems to have interposed to secure an abundance of evidence to this great point. Heathen historians of that age, although their attention does not appear to have been much directed to Judea, are nevertheless explicit in reference to it.

Suetonius, in his *Life of Vespasian*, says, “ There had prevailed through the whole east an ancient and fixed opinion that it was fated that, at that time, some should rise from Judea, and obtain the government of the world.”†

Tacitus also testifies “ that the generality had a strong persuasion, that it was set down in the ancient writings of the Priests, that, at that very time, the east should prevail, and that some, to come out from Judea, should obtain the empire of the world.”‡

The Jewish historian Josephus also asserts the same. In relating the causes and incidents of the Jewish war, he says, “ But that which principally encouraged them to war, was an ambiguous oracle, found also in their sacred writings, that about this time, some one, from their country, should gain possession of the world.”||

Philo, another Jewish writer of that period, thus describes the expectation. “ For as the oracle saith, (Num. xxiv. 7.) a man shall go forth, and warring against great and populous nations, shall overcome them, God sending all suitable aid to the godly ; this man shall extend his conquest for the good of the conquered, so as to be the strength of the empire, and the head of the human race. Hitherto these things have

* Luke i. 68—75. “ Haud defuit, quidem peccatorum expiatorum, atque sacrorum et morum ad summam puritatem perducendorum spes, quam pii homines inter Judæos semper foverant.”—*Commentatio De Morte Jesu Christi Expiatoria*. Opuscula Theologica, G. M. L. De Wette. p. 72.

† Chap. iv. ‡ Tacit. Hist. l.v. c. 13. || Jos. de Bell. l.vi. c. 5. § 5.

been simple wishes, but as I believe, will be real facts, God affording a plentiful harvest of virtue ; of which things, not yet attained, we cherish the desire almost from infancy.*

Another very striking and decisive evidence of the universal existence of this expectation, at that time, in Judea, is found in the effect which it had produced upon the minds of the people and the condition of society. It had engaged the curiosity, exercised the imaginations, and inflamed the sensibilities of the whole nation; and its influence was developed in a perpetual series of popular commotions occasioned by a succession of persons, either enthusiasts or impostors, claiming to be the expected Messiah. Josephus gives us particular accounts of these seditions and impostures.† Some of them are mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles.‡ And we are not without heathen testimony of the same purport.||

But the most decisive evidence of the existence of such an expectation at the time of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, is borne by the modern Jewish writers themselves. They admit its existence. They not only admit that the Messiah was expected at that time, but some of them have asserted that he actually came before the destruction of Jerusalem, and that he still lives in concealment and humiliation, lurking in caverns and dens, awaiting the fulfilment of the times for his manifestation in glory. This Rabbinical fancy was at one time quite prevalent among the the Jews, and they went so far in their credulity, as to affirm that this their masked Messiah once disclosed himself to Joshua Ben Levi, a learned doctor of their nation, and held a long interview with him.§ But the latest and most common expedient of the Jewish divines is to assert that there are two Messiahs ; that the suffering Messiah appeared previous to the destruction of Jerusalem, and that the triumphant Messiah remains to be manifested in the approaching fullness of the times.

Then again, besides all the direct testimony to the

* De Præm. et Pæn. See Chandler's Defence, 26. † Jos. de Bell. l.vi. c. v. § 3. ‡ Acts v. 36, 37. xxi. 38.

|| Sueton. vita Claudii c. 24. Judæos, *impulsore Chresto, assidue tumultuantes Romæ expulit.* Tacit. Annal.ii. 85.

§ "Rabani Mauri Liber contra Judæos."

point, we can trace the transmission of this extraordinary expectation, from Judea, as from a centre, into the traditions and popular superstitions, and poetical fancies of all the other ancient nations. "It was neither to Judea nor Syria," says a learned writer to whom I have been much indebted in this part of my argument, "that this expectation was confined. There are the same traces of the expectation of some great personage among the profane writers of the heathen nations, which we have just pointed out among the Jews and Samaritans in the New Testament. Not to insist upon some passages of Cicero, which might require too much space to elucidate them, the fourth eclogue of Virgil may be adduced as a specimen and record of the notions that prevailed. To any one, who will compare the poem with the prophetic writings, and note the correspondence, it will be unnecessary to multiply considerations."*

There is indeed nothing more striking to the careful student of the literature of that period than the indications every where presented of such an anxious, and, as it was to many, "fearful looking for" of change. By the operation of causes, which seem to have eluded the scrutiny of the wise men of the day, an undefined, vague and mysterious impression had been made to prevail, that some extraordinary event was about to occur, and that a great and universal revolution of society was impending.

This wide spread feeling had reached the priests of superstition, carrying solicitude and dread to their hearts, dimming the glory of their shrines, and closing the lips of their oracles. It supplied materials for the metrical enigmas of wandering Sybils, and suggested even to the immortal bard of Mantua those exquisite strains of polished flattery with which he sought to win the favor of Augustus. It was caught from mind to mind, until the wonderful and exciting contagion had pervaded the world, and the Saviour had become, with literal truth, "the desire of all nations."

In illustration and proof of these statements I will relate a story which Plutarch has recorded in his book on the "Cessation of Oracles," a title which itself in-

*Defence of Christianity by Edward Everett, p. 226.

dicates the feeling I have described. I would first observe, however, that Egypt was considered the fertile source of the Mythology, as well as the Science and Art of Antiquity; and that the name of Pan, he being the principal Egyptian deity, was often employed, particularly in the oriental nations, to denote the whole system of heathen mythology, theology, and superstition.

“In the time of Tiberius [saith Plutarch] certain persons embarking from Asia for Italy, towards the evening sailed by the Echinades, where, being becalmed, they heard from thence a loud voice calling one Thamous, an Egyptian mariner amongst them, and after the third time commanding him, when he came to the Palodes, to declare, that the great Pan was dead. He with the advice of his company resolved, that if they had a quick gale, when they came to the Palodes, he would pass by silently; but if they should find themselves there becalmed, he would then perform what the voice had commanded: but when the ship arrived thither, there neither was any gale of wind nor agitation of water. Whereupon Thamous, looking out of the after deck towards the Palodes, pronounced these words with a loud voice—THE GREAT PAN IS DEAD—which he had no sooner done, but he was answered with a choir of many voices, making a great howling and lamentation, not without a certain mixture of admiration. Plutarch, who gives much credit to this relation, adds, how solicitous Tiberius the emperor was, first concerning the truth thereof; and afterwards, *when he had satisfied himself therein*, making great inquiry among his learned men concerning its interpretation.”—(Cudworth’s Int. Sys. vol. 2, p. 178.)

You will perceive in this extraordinary anecdote, accredited, as it is, by as high authority as classical antiquity can boast, either an authentic account of a real miracle, or a fiction contrived and circulated in a superstitious age. Some writers have been inclined to regard it in the former light. The following interpretation presents the views of one who entertained a belief formerly much more prevalent than it now is, that the heathen oracles were conducted not merely by human artifice and imposture, but by the co-operation of evil spirits.

“It is probable,” says my author, “that this thing, coming to pass in the reign of Tiberius, *when our Savior was crucified*, was no other than a lamentation of evil demons upon our Savior’s death happening at that very time ; they not mourning out of love for him that was dead, but as sadly presaging evil to themselves from thence, as that which would threaten danger to their kingdom of darkness, and a period to that tyranny and domination which they had so long exercised over mankind.”—(Ibid, p. 179.)

While some have taken this view of the story, others, and I may say the generality of the later christian writers, have rejected it as a mere fable. This is the case with Lardner. He treats it as a fiction of no importance whatever. I am inclined however to regard it in a somewhat different light, not so much as a miraculous attestation of the advent of Christ, as an index and illustration of the popular sentiment, the existence of which I am attempting to prove.

Although I am willing, and upon the whole prefer, to regard it as a fiction, it is, however, but just to say that it is the most remarkable fiction within the compass of all antiquity ; and appears, to my mind, to make a nearer approach to the character of a real miraculous occurrence than any event recorded in profane history. Such relations are undoubtedly to be regarded, in general, when found in heathen writers, as entirely fabulous. There are however some considerations connected with this, which seem to give it a peculiar interest and importance. Upon comparing the dates, it is found to have happened about, if not at, the very time of our Savior’s crucifixion. It was of immense consequence to the government and to the then established religion of the Roman world, to have it exposed and disproved if it had not been founded in truth. It is certain that extraordinary pains were taken to explain it away, and that the result of such efforts was its full and complete vindication and authentication. It was recorded and has been transmitted entirely from heathen sources. It is stated by Eusebius, and the statement is sustained by the general opinion of the early christian writers, that from some cause or other, Tiberius became deeply interested in favor of the gospel. His good will and patronage were, no doubt, of im-

mense advantage to the primitive converts ; and it must be acknowledged that the establishment of the christian religion, and the consequent destruction of every form and system of polytheism and superstition presented an occasion not unworthy of the extraordinary interposition of the divine hand.

But without giving a positive opinion on the point, and for the sake of conducting the argument, on his own terms, with the sceptic, I am willing to let the whole story pass as a fiction ; but then I shall insist that it be accounted for. I know no other way of explaining it, than by admitting that it indicates a prevalent apprehension that the reign of the gods of the Pantheon was drawing to a close. The great pains Tiberius took to investigate it shews an anxious interest on the subject, and proves that he apprehended that there was something more in it, than a mere idle tale. If no such feeling as I have described had existed, can any one imagine that a story of this kind could have roused the notice of the Roman Emperor, and have exercised the talents of all his scholars and sages ! No—It was the state of the public mind which gave it importance, and in no other way can the facts be explained.

This great expectation might be proved by a variety of other evidence. Its existence is an historical fact. It brought the wise men from the East to the manger of Bethlehem. And we account for it upon the supposition that it was originally drawn from the writings of the Hebrew prophets, and the popular belief of the Jewish people, and gradually carried by travel, and transmitted by tradition, from that source, until in the lapse of centuries it had thus pervaded the whole world. It becomes the unbeliever to account for it in some other way. Let him do it if he can.

The argument by which we prove its derivation from a Jewish source is this. If it existed, at the commencement of the Christian era, throughout the known world, it must be admitted that it had its origin in a previous age, and at a period so far anterior as to have allowed time for its diffusion, in the methods, necessarily slow, by which ideas were then circulated over the earth. It must be traced back to its source somewhere. Now no other origin can be assigned to it than

such as we find in the Jewish scriptures. In them it is clearly expressed. In the book, generally supposed to be the most ancient of all, Genesis, we find recorded, in four several instances, the promise made to Abraham that in him should "all families of the earth be blessed."* Another of the oldest books expressly foretells the future advent of an individual, through whom this universal blessing should be bestowed. "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thy brethren, like unto me."† In some of the Old Testament scriptures the expectation is described with great particularity and fulness, as for instance in the passage commencing with the following words: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots, and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord," &c.‡ The same remarkable minuteness of description is exhibited in the chapter beginning with these words, "Who hath believed our report?"§ If any persons are desirous of ascertaining by their own inspection how plainly this expectation is described by the Old Testament writers, let them examine the following places. They are specimens of an almost infinite number of passages to the same effect. Isaiah ii. 1—4 [Micah iv. 1—4], lxv. 17—25, lxvi. 10—24. Jeremiah xxiii. 1—8, xxxiii. 15, 16. Ezekiel xxxiv. 23. Joel ii. iii. Amos ix. 11—15. Zephaniah iii. 14—20. Zachariah ix. 9, 10.

That these and similar passages were the expressions of an expectation on the part of their authors of a future Messiah, is evident on the face of them, and is, moreover, fully admitted by the Jewish writers of every subsequent period down to the present hour.¶

It might be shown that the whole structure of the Jewish constitution, as well as their scriptures, was expressive of this expectation. Instead of entering, at

* Gen. xii. 3; xviii. 18; xxvi. 4; xxviii. 14.

† Deut. xviii. 15.

‡ Isai. xi. 1.

§ Isai. liii. 1.

¶ Commentatio de Morte &c. De Wette, p. 101. For a more particular knowledge of the sentiments of the modern Jewish doctors, in reference to the meaning of the prophecies, see Schoettgen l. 2. p. 181.

length, into such a disquisition, I will content myself by quoting a few sentences from a writer, who has never been surpassed, in all the learning connected with the scriptures and system of the Jews. "The law of Moses," says Moses Lowman, "was designed to be a figure of good things to come." "The law of Moses is the gospel of the Messiah, in hieroglyphic or figure; so distinctly, so exactly does it represent the person, the offices, and the actions of the Messiah, the grace, blessings, and happiness of the christian church." "This was one design of the law itself, to preserve the memory of the promise, and prepare for the accomplishment of it."—Rational of the Ritual of Hebrew Worship, p. 59.

SEC. VII. RESULT OF THE ARGUMENT.

We are now provided with all the materials which are required to construct the argument in favor of christianity, drawn from Prophecy. We have proved the existence of an expectation, declared to be founded upon the express promise of God, entertained by an entire nation, for hundreds of years, and from them transmitted over the whole world. This expectation, thus entertained, has been fulfilled and still is fulfilling in the advent, character, life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, and in the history, influence, and progress of his religion.

It is to this point, then, that I would turn the attention of the infidel or the doubter. The argument cannot be avoided by asserting that this or that passage, called prophetic, is not relevant, or if relevant, might have been nothing more than a curiously lucky accidental conjecture resulting from an ingenious fancy, enlivened by poetical enthusiasm. No such expedient will meet the case. The prophetic argument does not rest upon the writings of Isaiah or Daniel or any other individuals whatever; it lies behind and beneath them, in the hearts and minds of an entire people. It was not a few men, who were employed to utter the voice of prophecy, a whole nation proclaimed it for centuries; and by the time of its fulfilment, the mysterious prediction was echoed back from every region of the earth. THE GREAT PROPHECY WAS PRONOUNCED BY ALL MANKIND.

This expectation stands out alone in the history of man. There is nothing like it in all the annals of our race. It can only be explained, in connection with its wonderful fulfilment, by admitting that it was indeed derived from Heaven; that it was a communication from God, and that, as the apostle expresses it, "in old time," that is, at a very early period, it was announced to the ancient people of God by "holy men" who "spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

It is of no consequence, in this view of the subject, to ascertain how many, or who, were endowed with the gift of prophecy. It may have been vouchsafed to but a single individual, and the supernatural prediction, uttered originally by him, may have been taken up and repeated by others; or there may have been a long line of inspired prophets, appearing in succession. Interesting and important as this question may be, it is immaterial to our present argument. The great point—the only point—is this—Was a degree of foreknowledge, such as could only be derived from God, actually communicated to men?

The evidence now adduced settles this question in the affirmative. An entire nation of men were in possession for centuries, of a degree of foreknowledge manifestly transcending the capabilities of human wisdom. They cherished an expectation, on the express ground of a divine communication made to their fathers, which cannot be accounted for on any merely natural principles. This expectation has been most wonderfully fulfilled. They were right, therefore, in regarding it as the promise of God. It was the promise of God. It was, indeed, the SURE WORD OF PROPHECY.

This is the prophetic basis of christianity. It is far beyond the reach of either the assaults of infidelity, or the researches of the verbal or the biblical critic. The claims of every Old Testament writer to the character of an inspired prophet may be brought into dispute. Discussion may range freely over the whole ground. Let it freely range where it will. It cannot weaken, it will only confirm the evidences of christianity. *These two facts*, that the whole world was in expectation, and that the expectation was fulfilled, cannot be shaken; and they prove that the expectation was

derived, not from the fancy or the fraud of man, but from the promise of God.

If the prophetic argument has been correctly stated, in this discourse, it becomes of importance that it should be generally understood, so that the friends of christianity may be no longer needlessly alarmed by the researches and discussions of biblical scholars. Those persons who are devoting their time and labors to the interpretation and elucidation of the ancient scriptures deserve the encouragement and commendation of all the advocates of religious truth and knowledge. Their enquiries cannot fail to advance the interests of true christianity, and must surely tend to confirm its evidences, the more freely and faithfully they are prosecuted.*

In this settled foreknowledge of distant future events, proclaimed by prophets, and entertained by successive generations, I cannot but discern the visible hand of God. It could only have been derived from men whose minds were inspired by the omniscient—whose vision was illumined by a radiance from the fountain of light. To look through the long procession of coming ages is a faculty which cannot be imagined to belong to any being beneath Him whose knowledge and whose power are infinite. The prophets, then, were inspired, and of course, the religion for which they prepared the way and provided the evidence, has come from God, AND IS TRUE.

In like manner we prove that the founder of christianity was divinely commissioned and inspired, for he also could look clearly into futurity. He was not only the subject of prophecy, he was himself the greatest of prophets.

The city of Jerusalem was one of the most magnificent and powerful in the ancient world. It was built by the command of God, and had been the residence of his church and people. Kings and Queens had come from far to gaze upon its riches and its power. At the time to which I am now to refer it was

* The public have reason to expect a great acquisition of information, in reference to the subject of the Hebrew scriptures, from the "Academical Lectures," of Rev. Prof. Palfrey, a work, whose publication would do much to advance the cause of theological learning.

crowded with inhabitants ; and, secured by the additional protection of Roman legions, it seemed as though it might safely bid defiance to all assaults. The hum of business, the noise of commingled industry and pleasure, and the voice of merriment, were rising from its streets and palaces. At this time, Jesus of Nazareth approached its walls, and looking over, beheld the city and wept, saying — “ If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace ! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee ; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another.*

Such was the prediction of Jesus of Nazareth, and before the ears of some who heard it were closed in death, it was literally and most awfully fulfilled. Not one stone was left upon another. Here too the event was brought about by the agency of men who were hostile to him whose prediction they fulfilled. The very people who crucified the Lord from Heaven, in their blindness and madness, confirmed his cause by accomplishing his prophecy in their own ruin and destruction. The same obstinacy and obduracy of heart which led them to reject the Messiah, impelled them to illustrate the divinity of his mission. They might have been saved, but they would not. When Titus, the Roman General, was traversing the ramparts he had raised against Jerusalem, and beheld the deep trenches filled with the decaying remains of the dead, and saw the haggard forms of the famishing inhabitants on the walls, and heard the moaning sound of horror and despair that rose from within them, we are informed by Josephus that he uttered a deep groan, and spreading out his hands to Heaven, called God to witness that he would have saved them, but that they would not be saved. The destruction of Jerusalem under such circumstances surely could not have been foreseen by finite intelligence. The words which Jesus spoke must have been, as he himself declared, suggested by his Father and his God.

* Luke xix. 41—44.

It has been well said that a prophecy is a perpetual miracle. When I consider the lamentations of the Savior over the approaching fate of Jerusalem and its inhabitants, in connexion with similar predictions in the most ancient Jewish records ; when I read these words, written more than a thousand years before the Savior had added his own prophetic sanction to them, "The Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from one end of the earth even unto the other—Thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a bye-word among all the nations whither the Lord shall lead thee. Among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest"*—and "lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations"†—When I read these words and then look out upon the present condition of the Jews, I cannot but feel that a miracle is transacting before my eyes. They strangely persist in rejecting Jesus as their Messiah, while by that very rejection they confirm his claim—and they cannot even hope that any other Messiah will arise, for their own scriptures affirm that he must be of a particular descent, of the family of David, and their genealogies have long since been confounded and lost. Their continued rejection of the Savior under such circumstances, against every principle of evidence, against the evidence of their own scriptures, against all the laws of the human mind, taken in connexion with their dispersion throughout the world, and present condition, affords a constant demonstration of the divine source of prophecy. Such conduct and such results never could have been foreseen by finite intelligence, and must be overruled by Him who ordereth all our ways, and works his own pleasure in the hearts of men, as well as among the hosts of Heaven. Here then we have a prophecy in visible fulfilment. It is a present miracle. Let us gaze with the same awe and admiration as we should have done had we heard the words "Lazarus come forth," and had we seen the conquered king of terrors yield up his prey. And while we gaze, LET US BELIEVE AND ADORE.

* Deuteronomy xxviii. 64, 37, 65.

† Numbers xxiii. 9.

SECTION VIII. CONCLUSION.

Finally, there is one prophecy, whose fulfilment all christians should contemplate with confidence, and labor and pray to hasten forward.

The portico of the temple of Jerusalem faced towards the east—on this portico Jesus once appeared at the dawn of day, and addressed the people who had thronged before it. As the sun lifted its disk above the mountains, and the golden radiance of a clear and bright eastern morning fell upon the temple, glittering in its blaze, Jesus pointed to the rising luminary, spread abroad his hands, and exclaimed, “I am the light of the world.”

He is the light of the world. His religion is destined to illumine the whole earth, and to bless every family. This is the sure word of prophecy. The years are rolling on—the hour is approaching—The day-star is even now ascending far above the horizon—The shades of night are retreating—and the symptoms that the sun of righteousness will soon pour his peaceful and heavenly beams over the whole face of nature are gathering thickly around us.

We discern these symptoms in the progress of liberty and knowledge—in the increasing prevalence of charity and toleration, and in a thousand different forms. Although the name of Christ is not yet every where acknowledged, the triumph of his cause is secured, and his spirit, which is the spirit of benevolence, already prevails over all others, extends to the ends of the earth, and holds the globe in its grasp.

Permit me also to say that I discern bright auspices of the accelerated conversion of the world in the movements in favor of christianity, made within a few past years, by the young men of this part of our country. They have called upon their religious teachers for a display of the evidences upon which our religion rests. May their example every where be followed by those who are entering upon the stage of active life.

When a real and intelligent interest is taken in the cause of the gospel, by all ages and classes in christendom, then will its borders begin to spread, as in the ages of primitive zeal and purity. Whenever an entire community is seen to move in defence of christianity,

from that point a light will be irradiated far and wide. Let each generation bear forward the cause, waft onward the glad tidings,

“ The joyful sound proclaim,
 “ ’Till each remotest nation
 “ Has learnt Messiah’s name.”

They who are soon to control the destinies of society are, in an eminent degree, interested in the cause of religion. It becomes them to examine its evidences, and ascertain its truths, and to avow and advocate fearlessly and faithfully the conclusions to which they may be brought.

Go forward, then, my young friends, in the course upon which you have entered. Enquire and search diligently and impartially. Devote your minds to the examination of the word, and subject your hearts to the operation of the spirit of God, now in the bloom of your lives, and in the season of your manly strength. Thus will you secure the blessings of religious faith, consolation, hope, and joy — and without these, all other blessings will be found vain and delusive. Thus will you promote the interests of the world by promoting the cause of him who came to be its light, and comforter, and savior. Thus will you hasten the reign of peace on earth and good will among men. And the reflection that, while here below, you did what you could to discover and promote the truth, and to make others as well as yourselves wise unto salvation, will be among the largest sources of your happiness, amid the glories and felicities of Heaven.